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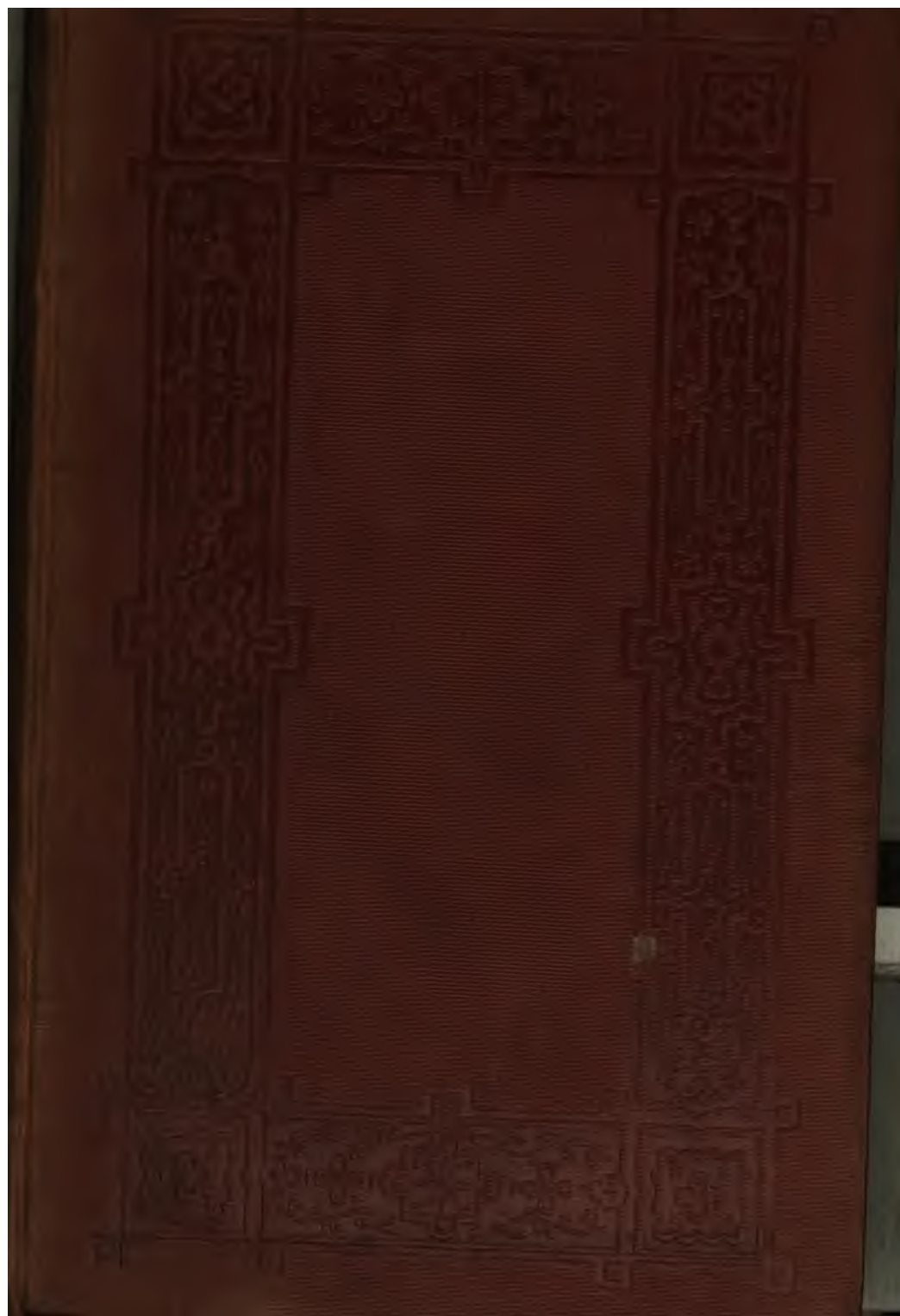
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THE
HEN-PECKED HUSBAND.

A NOVEL,

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE M.P.'S WIFE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:

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1848.

THE HEN-PECKED HUSBAND.

CHAPTER I.

It was a bright May morning. The sun had long been streaming through the half-opened shutters ; the birds had for hours been chirping, tuning up, and rustling amongst the clematis which clustered round the windows, when Theresa, after having wakefully and impatiently waited till her maid considered it time for her to be moving, rose with bounding

eagerness, and was out on the lawn of Major Keating's house, before any other shutters save her own, told that the inmates were rousing from their slumbers.

She walked round the gable-ended mansion, and looked up at each darkened window; even Georgy's was closed; so, secure in the feeling of at least an hour's liberty, she hastened off in the direction of her old haunts, and wandered on till she came to the well-known wicket at the end of the grounds.

This wicket opened into the woods, and there was not a path amidst all that tangled brushwood which Theresa did not know—there was hardly one which she did not tread, till she sat down breathless and half-weary, on the knotted trunk of the old chesnut tree, where, one year before, many an hour had been spent.

There was no sound to be heard but the humming of insects, the songs of the birds, and the quiet ripple of the river, which at that part was hardly wider than a brook, and

flowed in its clear course over a bed of pebbles with that silvery, dropping sound, which never disturbs the stillness of a solitary spot.

To an ear accustomed to the rattling of carriage wheels, and the various uncouth noises of London streets, the beauty and tranquillity of all around, charmed Theresa. The wild flowers, scenting the very air, and the water-lilies, floating so lazily here and there in little nooks and diminutive bays, formed by the uneven banks of the stream, were far more lovely in her sight and precious in her estimation, (for the time being) than the made-up bouquets of Covent-garden, or Maddox-street.

Intense enjoyment and love of the country was predominant at that moment over London pleasures and London parties, and as she turned her steps back to the house, her hands full of flowers, which were to be thrown on her table to die as soon as she entered upon ' busy life ' again, she said to herself—

“ If Seaton is only half as delicious as this, Mark shall buy it at once !”

The family were assembled in the breakfast-room when Theresa made her appearance, and as no one knew she had even been out, the freshness of her colour brought down many compliments as to country air.

Major Keating, a stiff, old-fashioned, exceedingly bluff gentleman of the olden time, was standing, by force of habit, apparently thinking he was warming himself, on the rug before the empty fireplace, his letters all crumpled up in hands which were clasped behind him, and his twinkling eyes alternately glancing at his son and Georgina, who for the first time was making tea in the place of her mother-in-law, and looking quite at home.

No two sisters could be less alike in manners and appearance than Theresa and Georgina, and since their marriage the dissimilarity had rather increased ; Georgy had grown still more steady,

and her dress was more simple than ever, for she wore sad and sober colours, and plain pink or blue muslins in the morning.

Mrs. Mark, on the contrary, was much more inclined to attire herself in an *outré* manner than with matronly sobriety; she always adopted a fashion the instant it was introduced, and therefore there was something singular about her, even when perfectly well dressed.

When the *crino-zephyr* made Parisian draperies seem to float in air, Theresa out-Heroded Herod; when the tight high dresses, fitting like wax round the throat, with their large-button-trimming, and their affectation of simplicity, made all the world look as if there had been a universal shortening of riding-habits, Theresa was among the first who rivetted English eyes upon the singular effect, and though no one could find fault with dresses so exquisitely made as hers, still everyone remarked as soon as her back was turned —

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“ Very beautiful, but how extraordinary looking.”

When a *modiste* of celebrity sends forth a dress which no English interference has marred, her chief pride is, that the *tout-ensemble* is too perfect to admit of remarks being made upon any separate portion of it—good taste avoiding anything remarkable; yet still, a very novel fashion will attract attention, and it was this that Theresa delighted in; she liked to “astonish weak minds,” according to her own expression, and certainly when she appeared at breakfast that morning in a Parisian costume of the most fly-away description, Mrs. Keating, who was a very old lady, very timid with strangers, and very plain in her own dress, felt dreadfully afraid of her, and could not have made the tea herself if she had been paid for it, so completely scared was she, between Mrs. Mark Chetwode’s elegance, and Mrs. Mark Chetwode’s ringlets, which her walk had made longer than ever.

Those who stay much in country houses generally assimilate their dress in a measure to the society they are likely to meet, or the style of people with whom they are to be domesticated, but Theresa never thought of any one but herself; she would have dined at the quiet rectory just outside the village of Seaton-Early in the same ruby velvet which had graced many a full dress dinner party, provided she took a fancy to wear it that particular day, consequently it was no wonder that Mrs. Keating said to her daughter-in law after breakfast when the belle was not present—

“ Surely, my dear, the country will never suit your sister—she tells me she was out before breakfast, but I am certain she never changed her shoes, for I saw the mark of them under her chair—I observed too that they were black satin; has she no clogs?”

Georgy laughed heartily at the idea of Theresa's feet in clogs and promised to examine

the thickness of her shoes, and then it became a question, what should they do that day, and what house should they go and see first?

There were several in the neighbourhood which were to be let; some ten, twelve, and twenty miles distant, but the nearest to the Hall (Major Keating's) was Seaton, unfurnished and for sale.

Georgina naturally inclined more towards this, than any other place, for the chance of establishing Theresa within a drive, was an object too desirable to be relinquished upon light grounds, and when Mark ventured to hint at the risk of a man like himself, without any pursuit, save his profession, taking upon himself an estate, she tried to make him believe how very much he would enjoy having a place of his own in which to spend a few months now and then, instead of going to watering places.

“ And after all you can hardly call it an

estate ; there is very little land belonging to it —the park is almost the extent of what you are obliged to call your own."

" But unfurnished, Georgy !"

" In these days how easily that is done !"

" True, but after all, I really only want a house for a few summer months ;—I should not like entirely to relinquish my profession, neither should I be happy in ever leaving Theresa so far from Town."

" Who is talking about likes and dislikes, and relinquishing their profession ?" said a gay voice, suddenly entering the room ; " what *do* you want with a profession, good man ?—playing at law !—making more money than you know what to do with !—is it not nonsense Georgina ? at his time of life he should retire."

Chetwode laughed and so did Georgy, but still his reluctance to be drawn into a purchase was as great as ever. To take the house, if it proved as tempting as it was described, for a year, or even more, he had no objection, but

without serious reflection to give up London and its duties as well as its ties, was more than he could resolve to do, and he was well lectured by his wife in consequence.

But, though Mark listened in silence and made little reply to her voluble arguments, he had not quite submitted in his own mind, neither was his opinion as yet changed, and all her powers of rhetoric could not induce him to make any rash promises.

Unfortunately, this roused Theresa's fatal spirit of opposition, and she inwardly resolved to gain her point, whichever way it might eventually lean; and when the carriage came to the door after luncheon, she was not in an amiable mood, but threw herself back with an air of desperate determination not to open her lips to her husband who sat opposite, till he proved himself worthy of her notice.

Through the beautiful lanes, just bursting into freshness—through the thick woods where the by-roads wound circuitously, the exploring

party pursued their way till they came out on the high road and stopped at the Lodge gate from whence, by the long avenue of chesnut trees of which Georgy had spoken so admiringly, they soon gained the broad lawn on which stood Seaton.

It was not exactly the style of house that Theresa had expected, but still it was beautiful. The rooms were not numerous, but every part and proportion of the building was modern, and bore traces of a hand of taste.

With the eager impatience of a child, Theresa ran through every suite, whilst Mark with deliberation and care was weighing in his own mind the advantages and disadvantages, and he hardly got beyond one room when she returned breathless, having gone through every one, and pronounced it exactly the place for them.

Of this, her husband was not so sure, though he did not like to say so; in the first place he

still felt very reluctant to take an unfurnished house; in the next, there were several pieces of ornamental water about the grounds, and the river at no great distance, and this, though very pretty and refreshing in summer, might prove anything but agreeable in winter, or at the foggy season of the fall of the leaf.

"You are not prepossessed!" whispered Georgy as she turned from her sister's glowing countenance, and saw the doubt and perplexity stamped on that of her brother-in-law.

"Damp!" returned Mark in the same tone, "and much too large."

"There is Mr. Pierrepont's house still to see, remember," said Georgy aloud, after they had gone over every nook and corner, "you must not be so charmed with this, Theresa, till you see Holm Park."

"I shall never like any place so much as this," was her sister's answer, "for I have been out on the top of the house, and I could

see all over the county—I could trace the river for miles and miles, till it loses itself in Major Keating's woods."

Georgina said nothing; her sister's love of those woods and that river always annoyed her, and she felt provoked with her at the present moment, for persisting in a predilection which was unaccountable to her husband, yet too clearly understood by Georgina. Sometimes she thought Theresa really did it to tease her, but she said nothing, trusting that the beauty of the place which they were to see next, might disenchant her with Seaton, since it was evident that Chetwode's views were decidedly in opposition to those of his wife, as far as regarded so serious a purchase as the estate they were driving through.

Holm Park was a totally different description of place; it was built in the cottage style, yet the house was quite as roomy as its more imposing neighbour. Every possible care appeared to have been lavished on both its exterior and

interior, and the moment the lodge gates were opened, it was easy to see that not a blade of grass was neglected.

Mark was struck by the perfect beauty of the miniature park and grounds, before even the thatched roof caught his eye, but the moment he gave utterance to his admiration, Theresa's face assumed its expression of contemptuous indifference, and she was determined, apparently, to be pleased with nothing.

As they drove up to the low portico, a livery servant appeared, and Mark exclaimed in some consternation that the house was inhabited.

"Of course!" exclaimed Georgina, "I told you it belonged to a Mr. Pierrepont, and he does not mean to leave until it is let; in a few minutes you will be in his presence."

"Oh, that destroys all!" cried Theresa, apparently hesitating whether she would even descend from the carriage, "if the owner is to follow us about, it is out of the question our examining his rooms as we should if we were left to

ourselves!—nothing is so horrid as to have one's every look and word watched, and if we object to anything we shall have to compose all sorts of polite falsehoods for the sake of the proprietor's feelings!—why did you not tell us Georgy that the family was here?"

"There is no one but Mr. Pierrepont—an original whom you will not mind at all—the family consists only of himself and his servants, for he is a bachelor."

When the message was sent in, that Mr. and Mrs. Keating had brought some friends to look at the house, Mr. Pierrepont came out himself to welcome them, and so pleased was he to see Georgina, whom every one now looked upon as a neighbour, that Theresa's airs and graces were lost upon him—perhaps it was, that his 'own were so manifold, that those of others were the less observed in consequence.

Mr. Pierrepont was a tall, stout man, with a very red face and very white hair, and a morn-

ing costume, a sort of library dress, which would better have become a younger and a thinner man, sat on him with a sort of careful carelessness, which he meant to be *degagée* in the extreme.

He was puffy and pompous too, to a degree; his house, and everything appertaining thereto, was his hobby, but to those who knew the pride he took in it, his humble manner of talking of it was exceedingly amusing.

"It is my sister," began Georgy, looking towards Theresa, "who is so anxious to see your beautiful place, Mr. Pierrepont; I told her you thought of leaving it, so that must apologise for my bringing her here without any notice, as well as the fact that she only arrived last night."

Mark was not mentioned; Mark was not thought of. Theresa was so completely the prominent person everywhere, that even Georgy, who was generally so cautious not to

make her mastery apparent, forgot for once that Mr. Chetwode was present, and never even introduced him.

"Mrs. Francis Keating is pleased to speak in most flattering terms of my poor domain," began the pompous man, as if his mouth were full of plums, and bowing gracefully to Theresa, whose only acknowledgment was the lowering of her large haughty eyelids; "but in point of fact, it is hardly worthy the faintest praise; I came here some twelve years ago, and found a wilderness—a ruin—and a pool of stagnant water where you now see, what I am foolish enough to dignify by the name of a lake."

"If it is not a lake," said Theresa, coldly, as she glanced at the beautiful piece of water over which hung willows and laburnums, whilst swans and rare birds were enjoying themselves on its surface, "pray what *do* you call it?"

"Oh, a pond—a pond—merely a pond," (and the plums seemed now as if they rolled over and over in his mouth) "on which, with per-

haps pardonable folly, I sometimes launch that miniature frigate, under the willow there—people are kind enough to say it is a curiosity, and a gem, and all that, but it is nothing—nothing at all. I have done absolutely nothing—I give nature the entire merit of anything you may see which may be so happy as to please your eye or suit your taste.”

Theresa was silent, but Georgy felt it necessary to insinuate that Nature had had a very able assistant, at all events, and Mr. Pierrepont nearly choked himself in vain efforts to prevent her uttering such gross flattery.

They went over the house; had they given a week's notice, things could not have been more scrupulously neat and clean; every room was furnished simply yet luxuriously, and even Theresa was obliged to own, she had never sat in such a chair as the one in which she was placed by the open window to admire the view.

“You think so?—you really think so?” asked the gratified owner. “Well, now, all

these attractions are lost upon me, so if my house gives satisfaction, not a vestige of merit attaches to me. I said to Gillow, 'send me chairs and tables, and sofas, for every taste,' and beyond giving that order, I did nothing. Some few I sent back, because they were not good enough for the friends who are pleased to imagine I know what is comfortable; but all praise is, I assure you, Gillow's, not mine."

"But there is a great deal in arrangement," said Georgy stepping out on the lawn, "your house and your grounds Mr. Pierrepont, are both equally well laid out, I must say."

"Reserve such commendation for my gardener," was the reply, "not for me; perhaps Mrs. Chetwode would like to go over the gardens."

"You leave him in charge of them I conclude?" said Mark, speaking for the first time, "a valuable appendage to the property."

"Yes—yes—I leave him, and two under him, *if I go*," answered Mr. Pierrepont shrug-

ging his shoulders, "in short, I leave as much as I can—gardeners, gamekeepers, and several servants for the house as well; not my own idea—no merit of mine—but friends assured me it would be a convenience for those who might wish merely for a summer's residence."

"Exactly," returned Mark, thinking to himself how entirely all things seemed to suit, "and you let the shooting with the house?"

"Why—if you call my few poor acres, shooting, I certainly do; there is fair sport for one gun, if you are a very good shot; now and then if I want a few baskets of game for a friend or so, or to fill my larder, I go out for an hour, and succeed as far as my moderate wishes—that's all—pheasants quite a nuisance! overrun with them—partridges, plenty—and hares;—but hardly any rabbits—I should be sorry if anyone fancying my poor place, had a partiality for rabbits—positively he would be lamentably disappointed in that branch of sport, and on that subject I would not deceive my greatest

enemy, trusting in Heaven no such person exists."

"For Heaven's sake," whispered Theresa, "silence this insufferable man with his mock humility, Georgy, and let us see what there is to be seen."

From the lawn, they descended terrace after terrace of flower beds, and then, entering the gardens, went over the hot-houses.

"And might I ask," began Mark, whose shyness had kept him very much in the background during the visit, "would you allow me to ask for how long a term you wish to be absent from this enviable place?"

"Why," and the pompous proprietor screwed up his mouth into the shape of an O, "I have not thought about that yet; Mrs. Chetwode must name her own time."

"I have been very remiss," said Georgy suddenly, as she saw Mr. Pierrepont had no idea who his fourth visitor was, "excuse the

late introduction, but this is Mr. Chetwode himself."

The difference in Mr. Pierrepont's manner was instantly perceptible—he now devoted himself to showing him over everything, and paid him all possible attention in order to make up for his previous neglect.

He took him into his farm yard to show him a litter of dwarf pigs, which were supposed to be matchless, and the odour of these precincts put Theresa still more out of temper;—he then led the way across heaps of smoking straw, to exhibit some other curiosity, and ended by taking them into an outhouse, where perpetual darkness reigned, to show what a wonderful plan his gardener had devised, for the cultivation of mushrooms.

Theresa's shoes were soon unfit to be seen, and her muslin dress in a hopeless state, having caught up straws, weeds, briars, and every creeping thing which could come under the

denomination of a "follower," yet she had persisted in treading upon her husband's footsteps—she would not lose sight of him for a moment, so certain was she, that if her eye were once off him, he would commit himself by either word or deed, and be talked into a bargain by the loquacious owner of Holm Park.

Georgina, meanwhile, had sat in the frigate on the lake, quietly talking with her husband, and wishing the inviting spot they were now examining, could be transported to the site of Seaton, for certainly the distance was a great objection.

Keating did not agree with his wife in this; he thought when people meant to keep two or three pair of horses, it did not much signify whether they were five or ten miles off, and as for Theresa's walking over to the Hall more than once in her life, supposing Seaton were purchased, he thought it perfectly impossible.

"This is the place for them—no trouble, but

everything ready to take possession, besides shooting for poor Chetwode, who looks more wan and hen-pecked than ever."

"Oh, do not say that," cried Georgy; "never say that to any one but me, for an epithet of that kind so soon clings to a man, and when once people fix on a cognomen for any one, they never think of the individual without the objectionable name attached to him."

"Ha, they will do that without any help of mine," returned her husband. "People have said already that poor Chetwode dare not call his soul his own, and if they talk like that in the wide world of London, what will they not do here, in this small gossiping neighbourhood, where, if you had a new pair of shoes on *one* day, my little Georgy, every house within fifteen miles would know of it the next? Take my word for it, these are not the people to live in the country altogether, and if Chetwode is persuaded into buying Seaton, he will be a greater fool than I take him to be."

When Theresa and her husband rejoined the Keatings, the expression on the face of the former was that of undisguised *ennui* and disgust, whilst Mark looked full of life and spirits, as if he had thoroughly enjoyed himself.

They took leave of Mr. Pierrepont with great graciousness, however, but no sooner was Theresa seated in the carriage than she exclaimed energetically,

"I hope and trust, during the remainder of my life, be it long or short, that I may see that odious man as seldom as it is possible for two beings in the same neighbourhood to meet. Of all the insufferable creatures on the face of the earth, surely he is the most so. For mercy's sake Georgy, tell me who he is."

"But what a tempting place—what an enviable spot," said Mark quickly.

"And such an enviable master," retorted Theresa. "You really seemed to admire him quite as much as his gardens and grounds. In spite of all the looks and hints I gave you,

Mark, you persisted in talking on, and have left him with the comfortable, but most mistaken, idea that you are going to take his house immediately."

"Nay, my dearest, I was very careful what I said; but it was quite impossible to receive such officious courtesy without making a few speeches in return—besides, he really seemed perfectly indifferent whether his house is let or not."

"A trick! a trick of the trade!—Georgina, who is he?"

Georgy laughed, and said that conjecture was very rife as to his origin—no one knew who he was, but those who knew his good and excellent heart, forgave his peculiarities;—people said his father had been a cheesemonger of the name of Pepper, which name did not please the man of half a million.

"If he does not change his mind, if he really lets you his house, you will be very lucky I assure you, for he knows what is comfortable."

“ Thank you—I have no wish to influence his mind one way or the other for my own is quite made up ; I never was so disgusted with any one in the whole course of my existence, and if any thing would tempt me to take his “ poor place” from him, as he calls it, it would be, the delightful idea of having thereby exterminated him from the county.’”

All this time, Mark’s silence was remarkable ; it was almost always impossible to tell by the outward expression of his face what was passing within, and now, its calm quietude was more inexpressive than ever ; he was either lost in thought, or else he was treasuring up Theresa’s sentiments in his heart, and new-modelling his own views and wishes by them.

Which ever it was, he never opened his lips till they came near Seaton again, and then as he looked up the grass-grown avenue, and glanced at the deserted lodge, he casually exclaimed,

“ Is there any shooting belonging to Seaton ?”

"None," said his brother-in-law, "none worthy the name, but Lord Rydal's property adjoins it on the north, and he would be the best neighbour in the world."

"*That's* all Mark thinks of!" cried Theresa, "the shooting! I really think he would rather take Holm Park which I hate, because of its shooting, than beautiful Seaton, which I think a Paradise, because it has none!"

"Yes—Chetwode is a very selfish fellow," said Mr. Keating sarcastically, "he thinks of nobody but himself—*ever!*"

And Theresa was silenced. The rest of their way home was spent in repose, for all were tired, and none seemed disposed to talk; hunger too has a very depressing effect, and Georgina candidly acknowledged that until luncheon was before her she could utter no more sentences, so on reaching the hall the demand became vociferous with all except Theresa, and she, pleading great fatigue, requested to have luncheon in her own room, and

desired the attendance of her husband, as soon as ever he had satisfied the cravings which even he did not deny.

"She is going to talk him over," laughed Georgina to her husband in a whisper.

"And she will fail," he returned, "she will fail for a certain time, because in the day he has courage to rebel; but wait till the curtain lecture comes!—if by that time her mind be still bent on the purchase of Seaton, our friend will succumb and Theresa be as usual, victorious!"

CHAPTER II.

MARK CHETWODE did as he was bid ; he hurried over his luncheon, and ascended to his wife's room, where, reclining on a sofa, drawn close to the open window, lay Theresa, gazing out on the view.

The lawn of the house was skirted by a belt of trees ; beyond them, the ground rose suddenly, and hill after hill succeeded, beautifully wooded, till the blue line of the last melted into the horizon.

That blue line was the boundary of Seaton, and to that Theresa now directed her husband's attention. She pointed out the beauties and advantages of the place, and dwelt on its convenient distance from her sister.

Mark owned that this was a powerful argument, but confessed that to tie themselves down to a country home, required a courage of which he was hardly capable, and he candidly told his wife that, were she to become disgusted with the purchase during some less attractive season of the year, his income during his mother's lifetime would not permit of his keeping up a house in Town as well.

Theresa said she did not want a house in Town; she wanted nothing but the home on which her heart was set; and if Mark would but allow her to spend two or three gay months of the London season in rubbing off the rust of a nine months residence in the country, he would find that he had made her the happiest creature in the world.

Here was another powerful argument! less likely than even the former to be resisted, yet to show how rooted must have been the prejudice in the mind of Mark Chetwode, even this failed to decide his mind or convince him of the wisdom of the step which he was being impelled to take.

To live in the country had never been his wish; he could not imagine how it had ever come to be even questioned, yet somehow it did certainly seem as though, by many conspiring circumstances, that end would be attained without his interference, and with constitutional indolence he at last began to wonder whether it would not be far better to yield to the strongly expressed wishes of one whose happiness was so dear to him, than annoy and irritate her by contesting a point where the combat was so unequal.

What plea could he have, sufficiently strong, to urge against a wish of hers? what reason could he give, sufficiently good, to excuse his

thwarting her in an innocent and natural taste how could he answer to himself for refusing to accede to her anxious request when she had so willingly consented to spend two, or even three months of the year in Town, *to oblige him!*

No;—Theresa was conquering; Theresa's mighty subterraneous battery was all this time going on most satisfactorily for her own views, and every word she uttered, carried the work of destruction onwards to completion, blowing up the prejudices, and scattering far and wide the feeble efforts at opposition which the ductile mind of the indulgent husband attempted to advance.

“It is the *purchase* at which I hesitate,” said Mark, in accents which told that this was the flash of the expiring lamp—“it is the hazard of taking so sudden a spring without any previous preparation to which I object; if I could but persuade you, my dearest Theresa, to try Holm Park for a year first!”

“Still harping on that detestable man's

house?—oh Mark you really harrass me out of my existence!—what is the use of being in Georgy's county at all, if we are to be placed at different ends of it?—I wish to be where I can see her constantly—of course!—not with miles and miles between us, making the exertion of meeting more like the fatigue of a journey than a pleasurable drive!—how very inconsiderate you are!"

"But my dearest, where are we to go whilst Seaton is furnishing?"

"Up to Town of course!—up to Town to superintend it all, and see what Gillow advises;—yet no—do not let us have Gillow—he furnished that odious man's house;—we will go to Jackson & Graham, and you will see if they do not put everything in for us in a month; that will save you a world of trouble Mark, and Georgina being on the spot, will see that all is well arranged; could anything be better than that?"

"Would you return to Hill Street?" asked poor Mark doubtingly.

"Of course not!—the idea!—when your dear good mother was nearly worried to death by us as it was!—no; why not go to Mivart's?"

"My dearest! amongst princes and potentates?—the most expensive Hotel in London?"

"And the most *distingué*; but you do not care for those things I see; do therefore as you like; I only wished to spare your mother's feelings, which might naturally be hurt were we to take a house for the time, when in reality, there is quite room for us in her own."

"True—very true; you are perfectly right!" cried Chetwode instantly convinced, "and I give you all credit, my Theresa, for so kind and thoughtful a suggestion—to an Hotel therefore we will go, and to Mivart's, since you wish it."

"Indeed, I do not wish it!" exclaimed Theresa, quite satisfied with her success, "I wish nothing to which you object, and some day I hope you will do me the justice to believe this; go to any Hotel you like—it is all the

same to me ; I remember some friends of ours were once very comfortable at Coulson's, and that is quiet enough, even for you. I should think !”

The conversation was still going on ; arrangements were insensibly creeping into form, and plans were imperceptibly falling into their right places under the adroit hand which so artfully swayed the sceptre of dominion, when carriage wheels came grinding up the gravel sweep, and a barouche, full inside and out, crept through the iron gates, and was very slowly and carefully drawn up beneath the windows.

“ Horrid country neighbours ! dreadful morning visitors,” cried Theresa springing up, “ thank Heaven the infliction is Georgy's—not mine ; get behind the curtain, dear good Mark, and reconnoitre ;—what are they like ?”

It was a large, roomy carriage with a pair of odd horses ; one was apparently several hands higher than the other, and both were in the most profuse perspiration.

A little boy of ten held the reins and whip with dignified delight, and by his side sat a gentleman whose likeness proclaimed him the proud father, and whose quick, careful eye never moved from the horses, although to judge by their appearance they were only too happy to stand still when once they were suffered to stop.

Inside sat a lady, still young and very pretty, and on her knee a chubby child; by her side, sat a nurse, on whose lap lay long robes of white cachemere bordered with blue plush, supposed to be the last baby, and on the opposite side were three more olive branches, little girls.

But the list did not end here; up behind, under charge of the footman, who seemed to think it much more than one man's work, were two little brothers of the young coachman on the box, and this completed the family group who had come to call at Major Keating's.

"Blanche Rydal I declare!" was Chetwode's

exclamation, as he looked down from his embrasure and viewed the noisy party—"Lord and Lady Rydal, Theresa, and all the children!—now what is to be done? for they have certainly come to call on you!"

Theresa flung herself back in despair!—nothing should induce her to go down—Mark must go instead, and say she was fagged to death, and must be excused from appearing—but first, he was to be silent that she might hear what they were saying.

Major Keating and his son had both gone out on the steps to welcome their visitors, and everybody was talking at once; the baby too had woke up, and seemed inclined to cry, so the nurse was singing to it with the whole strength of her lungs, whilst the little boys behind beat time to the air on the footboard with their thick nailed boots.

With the summer scents of clematis and roses, this Babel of sounds floated in at the open window upon Theresa's fastidious ear.

"Yes—we are all here," Lord Rydal's loud, good-natured voice was vociferating — "in fact we hardly knew how to divide the party, for fear the boys should get into mischief; they all came home yesterday, for there was a case of measles at Eton, so they have broken up a fortnight before their time...."

"And very delighted we are," chimed in Lady Rydal, "though I have had a sad fright with Tommy;—he has got a swelled face, and it looked so like mumps that until Mr. Plaister assured me it was only a tooth, and extracted it, I was miserable."

"But he bore it like a man, he did!" sang the nurse to the tune of 'merrily danced the Quaker's wife,' in order to keep up the baby's attention, "he bore it like a ma-a-n!"

"So he did," said the father—"and I see you are looking at my horses Major Keating—no wonder—but we promised Tommy he should drive to-day if he would have his tooth out,

and you see I have kept my word, only I was obliged to be particular in the selection."

By this time, the whole troop, all excepting the honourable Tommy, were gradually entering the house, but he preferred retaining his exalted station on the coach-box, to the infinite annoyance of the footman, who had been looking out for half an hour's peace.

"I don't see Lord Chester," said Major Keating, as if he had been counting them over, "I hope he has not got the measles?"

"Oh dear, no!" cried the mother, "he is out fishing with some friends, otherwise," she added apologetically, as if she had not brought enough, "he would have made a point of accompanying us."

And now they had all entered the drawing-room, and had been kissed all round, and the baby had got Mrs. Keating's spectacles, so it was in a frenzy of excitement and delight, when Chetwode, by himself, entered the crowded

room and went through the ceremony of kissing them all round again, some by fair means, and others by foul, after which he made his wife's apologies.

He said she was very much fatigued, and trusted she might be excused from coming down; she had been house-hunting all the morning, and was really quite knocked up. In short, he did it very well, and her non-appearance was placed in the most favourable light.

Blanche was very much disappointed at having to go away without seeing one of whom she had heard so much, and so honestly did she confess how much she should like to see her, even in her room, that Mark actually went up to ask Theresa if she would let his cousin come and introduce herself.

"You will not mind Blanche the least," he said; "she is the most artless, natural, motherly woman in the world, and really wants to see you and make your acquaintance; she begged me particularly to say it is not often

she can take so long a drive, because of her baby."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Theresa, "what a message to send up *by you*! really these mothers of families seem totally lost to all sense of *les bienséances*—what a message!" But in spite of all her husband could say, and in spite of the attractive temptation of "all the children," Theresa would not appear. She said the visit was just as much to her sister as to herself, and she really could not take the trouble.

So Mark went down with a proper message, and in a few minutes he came up again with another. "Would Theresa fix some day for either spending a long morning or dining at Ringmere?"

Yes—Theresa had no objection to a dinner party, and she was "agreeable" to any day that would suit the rest, so her husband re-descended and then re-ascended, and said that the next day but one was decided on.

“How good of you,” cried Lady Rydal, on his third appearance; “how well he has learnt to ‘fetch and carry,’ has he not, Mrs. Keating?—so like the excellent Mark that I remember him as a bachelor, yet, somehow, so unlike a married man.”

And then the project of living in the country some part of the year was canvassed, and as far as Chetwode could learn in the confusion of tongues that reigned around, Lord Rydal was decidedly of opinion that Mr. Pierrepont’s house was more likely to suit Londoners than Seaton.

“The house of Seaton is very large,” he said, “and the land about it singularly scattered. There are fields here and there, running into the property of other people, and involving the owner into all sorts of disputes; it is a singular fact too, that every proprietor hitherto has abdicated, in consequence of differences with the next neighbour, old Bransby; if you shot a partridge in your own turnips, and it fell on

the other side of the hedge, on his ground, he would not hesitate to call you a poacher for life. I assure you, if you buy Seaton, you will find you have a most troublesome neighbour in Mr. Bransby."

"But Mrs. Bransby is a very delightful person," said Lady Rydal; "I am sure Mrs. Chetwode would like her very much—so we will ask them to meet you. She has six young children, and Mr. Bransby looks like their grandfather."

At last the visit came to a conclusion; the children had begun to get troublesome, and the nurse thought that by the time they were at home again they would be very hungry, so on this hint the cavalcade began to form into marching order.

The inside passengers were all stowed in; the little boys had clambered up behind; the footman was hanging on, partly because he did not choose to seat himself till they had ended the usual battle between each other for more

room, and partly to catch whichever of them should be in danger of falling over, and Lord Rydal was mounted on the box; the Honorable Tommy awoke the small horse by a giant's lash, and succeeded in turning both on the gravel sweep without overturning the rest, and Theresa gladly saw them depart.

All the remainder of that day the subject of thought and conversation was naturally Seaton, or Holm Park, and against the latter, Mrs. Mark continued so inflexibly opposed that her husband really dreaded introducing it at all.

Her brother-in-law had not his scruples; unaccustomed to allow his own wife to take any part in domestic arrangements of any kind, he used to grow quite angry when he saw the influence Theresa possessed, and provoked with Mark, first for so invariably submitting, and next for trying to deny that he did so.

Mr. Keating was strongly against the purchase of Seaton—he did not hesitate to speak his mind freely too, whilst they were waiting

for dinner that day, all assembled in the drawing-room.

Theresa sat on a low seat at the open window whilst he was speaking, and took little notice of what he said for some time, until, apparently treating his interference as a joke, she looked up in his face and said—

“How kind it is of you to put yourself in such a fever on our account! one would think you had some great interest in the letting of Holm Park, Francis! otherwise you would not take up the unenviable position of pushing in between man and wife! do you not know that people who are so foolish as to do that, always make themselves ridiculous, without gaining anything by it?”

“I am giving Chetwode good advice,” retorted Mr. Keating, “which no one else in this house either can, or is privileged to do!”

“You are very clever—but when a man takes a wife, and proves a good husband, do you not sometimes find that in the choice of a

home, he is rather disposed to make her both adviser and chief actor in all that is to be done?"

Dinner fortunately was announced at this juncture, and no more was said till the evening; when the old Major having gone to sleep, Keating sallied out on the lawn with his brother-in-law, and smoked a cigar, in which Mark would have given worlds to have joined him, but it was forbidden.

The person who acted as agent to the proprietor of Seaton lived in the village of Seaton-Early, two miles from the Hall, and after many harassing hours of indecision, Chetwode decided that it would do no harm to go and call on him, and enquire all particulars, if his brother-in-law would go with him, and if his wife would sanction it.

This clause was always the harbour in which Chetwode took refuge, and the rock on which Keating struck, and though he agreed to take the walk betimes the next morning he would

not say a syllable now, one way or the other, as to the eligibility of the purchase.

The next morning, before the household were stirring, Mark, permitted to undertake the expedition, and charged with a thousand injunctions as to how much he was to say, and how little he was to do, mounted the pony prepared for the purpose, and started for Sea-ton-Early.

The agent was at breakfast, but readily gave every required information ; he neither praised nor with mock humility depreciated his charge, and Chetwode returned home, having promised to bring his wife in the course of the day to ride over the grounds, and go once more over the house, yet still, one could see in every word he uttered, that he still *hung back*.

Nothing had been said that could in any way either add to his scruples or remove his prejudices ; every sentence that had fallen from the lips of the lawyer with whom he had been conversing, was to the purpose, and no more,

therefore the chaos of Mark's mind was of his own creation, and his brother-in-law saw it, and pitied him.

Those who are constituted firm of opinion and strong in mind, neither understand nor make allowance for the "weak as water," and the "infirm of purpose;" they only think within themselves "thou shalt not excel," and their feelings for them are only those of commiseration in consequence.

As they slowly approached the house, the fluttering of Theresa's muslins and ribbons roused her musing husband to take advantage of the very few minutes more in which he could benefit by the advice of his brother-in-law.

"But I will give you no more," was the unsatisfactory reply; "it is not taken in good part, and so I shall leave you to your own devices; one thing, however, I think I might safely urge, and that is, that you do not take this on your shoulders unadvisedly, particu-

larly in your present doubting state of mind—remember a purchase is not for your own life only—an estate is for posterity as well.”

“ But you refuse to advise me ? ”

“ Yes—because you have others of whom Theresa may have a higher opinion—Bathurst for instance.”

“ Ah, Bathurst indeed ! ” exclaimed Mark, “ if I could but get his opinion I should feel safe in any step I took !—but Theresa..... ”

“ I thought Mrs. Mark had a very high opinion of him ? ”

“ Perhaps...I do not know...I really forget if any instance...”

“ My dear fellow,” said Keating suddenly arresting the footsteps of the undecided man, “ I have a plan in my head, and when that is the case I act upon it instantaneously. I will write to Bathurst this very morning and ask him down here for a few days; *no one* is supposed to know, not even he, why his company is required, and before the purchase of this con-

founded Seaton is completed, talk to him alone! —there now!—you ask my advice and I have given it, and whether you wait for him or not, I shall write!”

This proposition, though startling, was nevertheless a most welcome one to Chetwode, for in the depths of his heart there still lurked that almost reverential regard for Bathurst and his opinion, which had made him the guide of his earlier years.

That the suggestion too of a visit from him should have emanated from Keating and not from himself, was rather a pleasing reflection to Chetwode, and he joined Theresa, intending at some convenient moment to tell her of the invitation which would be, by that time, despatched.

Till the post had gone out, however—till the letter was in the inevitable bag—he did *not* tell her!—and then, the reason for which the visit was requested, he concealed from her!

In this slight action, this apparently insignificant concealment, how much of the effect of the last few months of strife and struggle was visible!—The husband was *afraid* to confess the real object for which he was desirous of the society of his friend, and placed the whole responsibility of the invitation on the shoulders of his brother-in-law!

If he thought he deceived Theresa—if indeed he had any such intention—he was himself mistaken. In a moment she saw that the head of another than her unstable husband had been at work to circumvent, and she took her measures accordingly.

On a pony, with Mark at the bridle, walking happily by her side, she that morning bent her way through the beautiful woods and lanes again, to tread the chesnut avenues of Seaton.

The weather, which tends so much either to beautify, or to spoil, was this day more like summer than spring; the banks were yellow with patches of primroses, and where the lanes

were close and narrow, the scent of the violets seemed quite to hang on the still air. Branches of dog-roses drooped down from the young, green hedges, and that calm, enjoyable sensation which steals over us in such scenes, filled Theresa and her husband with a sort of tranquil happiness seldom enjoyed by them in common.

Then as they slowly wound up through the trees, and came out on the broad lawn where stood the sunny house, discovering every moment attractions, which, from a carriage, had been completely lost to them, their mutual admiration increased—every step made them more and more pleased with what they saw, and as Mark placed his arm round his wife's slight waist, and lifted her to the ground, for the first time he cordially shared her sentiments with regard to Seaton, and agreed in her low-toned but earnest whisper—

“If this were but ours how happy I should be!”

The agent, a quiet, silent man, stood on the steps ready to receive them. He had had all the windows opened, and the rooms were feeling warm as well as looking comfortable. The garden paths, too, had been swept and weeded, and everything seemed as if a very little time and trouble were required to make the place habitable.

The farm, which they had not before visited, came in for a share of the general inspection, and the agent, in the course of their round, pointed out the great advantages which a peculiarly constructed stable offered. In short, under his guidance, things which had before been totally overlooked, now shone out as indispensable to every house, yet to be found in very few.

Before they left, Mark commented on the ponds about the grounds; one of his prejudices was, water near a house.

"You might drain them," was the reply, "they are full of fish certainly, and even to

Mrs. Chetwode they might afford a sort of easy, idle sport for a summer-day—but even drained they could be turned to advantage, since no soil nourishes American plants like the bed of a lake or a pond;—Lord Rydal set the fashion here for their cultivation, and has a garden well worth the loss of his lake.”

Theresa was delighted with the idea; she seized on it as a novelty, and impressed upon her husband how very little he would be allowed to do were he to hire instead of buy—besides the constant interest attached to a place of one's *very own*.

True, thought Chetwode, and every sight and every word now drew him more and more into the net until, like all who try and try to convince themselves of what they do not quite acknowledge, he ended by believing that it was his own anxious wish to purchase Seaton, and that in that, his wife most cordially seconded him!

“Say nothing to the Keatings,” said Theresa,

as they started *en route* home again—"let us think it over seriously *to ourselves* and *by ourselves*, and when we have quite made up our minds then we can talk to them about it; but I always think, that when people are at all irresolute on a subject, the conflicting opinions of others only confuse them still more."

"Very true," answered Mark, "I agree with you, my Theresa, and yet I have a presentiment that our minds are now so nearly made up, that the opinions of others will have very little effect on our decision."

¶ Theresa smiled—a smile that was sweet, but perfectly inexpressive—yet her heart beat with triumph at the change she had wrought in her husband's sentiments.

It was a triumph to her, thus to have brought him round! thus to have defeated all his own objections and the firm opposition of her brother-in-law!—But one triumph, greater still, remained to be achieved, and till that was completed, her ambition would be very

from satisfied ; it was, that Seaton should be actually purchased, the papers formally drawn up, signed, sealed, and ratified, all before the arrival of one, whom she knew had been summoned solely to give his sapient opinion on the subject !

In spite of all that had passed, however,—in spite of the inch that Chetwode had conceded, a hard struggle had yet to take place before the ell would be given ;—at that point the husband stood at bay—not for long, but for a sufficient time to prove to his more resolute partner, how great was her conquest, and how great his sacrifice !

For a time he certainly did stand at bay—for four and twenty hours ;—but on the morning of the third day, a letter came from Mr. Bathurst, delighted to accept the invitation, but sorry that he had engagements which prevented his joining the party for the next few days ; on Monday, in the following week, he

would be with them without fail, and this delay was death to his influence, and new life to the projects of Theresa.

This was a Friday.—Mark was much disappointed ; he bethought him of writing a full account of the whole state of the case to his friend, and then the reply, by return of post, arriving on Sunday, would enable him to take measures the first thing on Monday morning, supposing the answer of Bathurst agreed with his own views.

Deep in this inward cogitation he hardly saw the entrance of Theresa, till a white hand was laid on his shoulder, and the most silvery of voices, as he thought, whispered in his ear a petition that he would take another delightful ramble through the woods with her, for that the pony was at the door, waiting for them.

Too happy, he started from his reverie and obeyed, forgetting for the time his letter, and all about it. Into the lanes they therefore

went, and from thence to the winding path on the red banks of the river; they then struck into the mazy and briar-grown paths through the woods, where they succeeded in losing their way, and, finally, emerged on the high road, at least, four miles from home.

Four miles on a small, slow pony, going at a foot's pace, are not achieved in a few minutes, and as, when they first found their right road, the sun was descending to the horizon of hills, and leaving long streaks of purple, red, and gold on the sky, which looked very like sunset, it was not long before he dipped behind the deep blue downs, and told the wanderers that the day was gone.

The first dinner-bell rang as they entered Major Keating's grounds—the post-man was galloping off in a contrary direction, as though he were already late, and on Saturday there could be no post at all!

Thus, a fate was against Mark Chetwode, and he yielded to it. When Mr. Bathurst ar-

rived at the Hall on Monday evening, the title deeds of the estate were all signed, sealed, and delivered—the voluminous papers were in Mark's own possession, and Seaton, in short, was irrevocably, his own !

CHAPTER III.

BUT before the arrival of Mr. Bathurst, came the dinner party at Lord Rydal's, and Theresa, glad of the excitement, went in very good humour and dressed "to astonish the natives."

She was rather curious too, to see what Mrs. Bellingham's daughter would be like, though she had long known her by description as a pretty, good-natured little woman; all these qualifications were so unlike the mother that Theresa did not expect to find her answering the portraits that had been drawn of her.

And yet, on entering the room, how little did she expect what she saw! a little woman certainly sat on the sofa, but one who occupied, in amazing breadth, nearly the whole of it, and who, when she rose, in a stiff, blue satin dress, looked more like a chimney ornament of Dresden china than anything else.

How any one looking so young and so fair, could be so fat, passed Theresa's comprehension, but certainly she seemed good-tempered enough, and talked to Theresa as if she had known her for years.

On the same sofa, squeezed into the corner of it, by dint of having turned the sofa cushion up, sat Mrs. Bransby, the wife of the quarrelsome man, who was introduced to her future neighbour, and set about improving the acquaintance without any loss of time.

Before dinner was announced, Mr. Keating stole to the back of his sister-in-law's chair, and under pretence of showing her a flower, whispered,

"If, before you have known Mrs. Bransby two hours, she does not tell you a story of a governess—never mind what—I give you leave to demand a pair of gloves at my hands."

"Done," laughed Theresa, and the party moved in the usual order into the dining-room.

The Rydals, despite the coronet attached to their name, were not great people in their neighbourhood; they were too affable, too domestic, and too bent upon being liked by every body, to be any more than very nice people.

Those who wish to be thought a great deal of, must make a great deal of themselves; and those who possess the secret respect, veneration and dislike of inferior beings, are generally people who hold themselves exceedingly high, and profess to be very exclusive.

The Tremlett-Tremlettsons were the great people of the neighbourhood of Seaton-Early. Lord Rydal was a very small man compared to Mr. Tremlett-Tremlettson, and poor lowly

cottagers would shake in the august presence of the latter, when the appearance of the former was a signal for a general running to the doors to catch a nod or a smile.

They had been asked for that day to meet the Chetwodes, but had declined. Lady Rydal laughingly told Mrs. Bransby that Mrs. Tremlett-Tremlettson did not wish to meet Theresa until she had seen her somewhere by accident and judged whether she would be presentable at her parties.

Any one deemed worthy of admission to Mrs. Tremlett-Tremlettson's house, might rest assured they were either very pretty, very elegant, or very *distingué* in appearance.

"And therefore," added Lady Rydal, "I do not think our guest of to-day need have any fears!"

Mrs. Bransby, when the ladies assembled in the drawing-room, manœuvred to place herself by Theresa, and began admiring Lady Rydal's

little girls, two of whom were allowed to sit up till tea-time on company occasions.

"Such sweet children—such elegant little figures," began the rival mother; "but I confess to you, my dear Mrs. Chetwode, that I should be terrified to death if my girls had such small waists."

"Perhaps yours are younger," said Theresa, "and their figures less formed."

"No—on the contrary, my two eldest are eight and nine—indeed they have a governess."

"Really," answered Theresa, seeing that she was expected to say something.

"They have indeed—sometimes I wonder at my own courage, but they really have! If you did but know all I went through with my last governess, you would wonder I could ever bring myself to have another—but my duty to my children—"

! An irresistible inclination to laugh seized Theresa; the wagger recurred to her mind, and

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as clothed in so mysterious a garb, Theresa
could not make out what Mrs. Bransby meant;
she could not imagine who the "member of the
family" could be, and plainly asked for an
explanation. The admirable expression of em-
barrassment which stole over the lady's counte-
nance was very well assumed, and so was her
hesitation before she answered,

she actually did laugh, at which Mrs. Bransby put on the gravest of faces.

“You would not laugh—you will not, I am sure, when I tell you!” she exclaimed, “but it was the most shocking affair altogether—this dreadful woman, young in years, but old in deceit, had been with me for an immense time; in fact, I had the greatest confidence in her—just imagine my horror, when I, all at once, discovered that she was in the habit of writing notes to a member of my family, and evidently sought to undermine the peace and happiness of every one of us!”

Clothed in so mysterious a garb, Theresa could not make out what Mrs. Bransby meant; she could not imagine who the “member of the family” could be, and plainly asked for an explanation. The admirable expression of embarrassment which stole over the lady’s countenance was very well assumed, and so was her hesitation before she answered,

“But still—I do not see why I should mind telling *you*, Mrs. Chetwode; the notes—were to my—*husband*.”

That any one, “young in years,” should, as Mrs. Bransby insinuated, write amatory effusions to a man old enough to be a grandfather, with a figure like a turtle, and a face like a tomato, nearly killed Theresa, who was in that humour when the least thing makes one laugh, and she could not control her merriment, any more than she could conceal it.

“I am surprised at your laughing,” said Mrs. Bransby, “for no one ever did so before. When you are a mother, you will feel differently. Lady Rydal always laughs, certainly, but she is so exceedingly volatile, and she has never been tried; I am not naturally jealous, but I confess I was not an angel in this case, and my indignation was extreme.”

“No wonder,” said Theresa, trying to make up for her rudeness. “I should never have

thought Mr. Bransby such a Lothario. What did the notes say?"

"Dear Mrs. Chetwode, exonerate my husband, for he was more sinned against than sinning; I never will believe that he looked twice at her—and as for the notes, it was more the act of writing to him, than anything they contained, which I so severely punished. I begged her to leave my house immediately, and she did."

The approach of the coffee made Mrs Bransby start off in a most desultory and incoherent conversation about the weather, whilst her large, sleepy eyes rolled from the servants to Theresa, with looks which she meant to be full of expression.

"Servants talk so," she whispered; "I would not have this get about for the world."

Yet every one knew that there was not a man, woman or child, within the limits of that part of the county, who had not heard the

whole story, over and over again—for there was no grade amongst whom Mrs. Bransby did not contrive to introduce the subject, by some clever and appropriate adaptation.

“For the sake of old Bransby’s purity of character,” said Mr. Keating, as they all drove home, “I must tell you that Rydal was called in when the row took place, and saw the note that caused it; it was to represent to the father, who is both passionate and deaf, that no human power could prevail on his eldest girl to learn the “rudiments of Latin,” on which, when he engaged the governess, he laid the greatest stress. Not a word, not an allusion of any other kind sullied that unlucky note; her greatest fault and mistake was, addressing herself to old Bransby, instead of his wife; and if, Theresa, every time you meet that worthy woman, she does not tell you the story over again, you may send your glove bill in to me, as regularly as Christmas comes round.”

Theresa observed with some surprise, that the next morning at breakfast, the old couple were regaled by their son with the most minute account of the party, and listened to every particular with the most lively interest.

Georgy too, aided her husband in retailing all the little pieces of scandal and gossip of every family round, and seemed completely to have embodied herself as one of the society.

To Theresa, this was miraculous. She could not enter into the local interests so readily, and the sayings and doings of the neighbours were matters of perfect indifference to her. She looked upon it all with more of contempt than tolerance, and ridiculed Georgy for her patient endurance of such wearisome conversation, forgetting that she herself was about to become a member of the very society, of whose goings on she professed such utter indifference.

This manner, which she never attempted to conceal, only convinced the Keatings still more of the folly of her husband, in imagining she

would make the abode on which her flighty fancy had rested, her settled home.

Dependant as a resident in the country must, and ought to be, on the surrounding neighbours for society, pleasure, and even friendship, Mr. Keating's first advice to his wife had been, to make herself generally agreeable; to be "as wise as a serpent, and as harmless as a dove," and above all things, never to do or say anything likely to attract attention or make enemies, and this course Georgina studiously followed.

There was no one in the world, as yet, who had had power thus to control her sister; so, instead of looking forward to her residence amongst them with satisfaction, Mr. Keating never thought of it without positive fear—his greatest dread being that Theresa would embroil her husband with those around them.

"Remember, however," came Georgy's argument, like 'oil upon the waters,' as usual, "you were wrong when you thought that

Theresa and her mother-in-law would never get on well; you may prove just as wrong now. Had it not been for the servants, she would have lived there very peaceably.

Mr. Keating would not quite agree to this; Mrs. Chetwode was a mild old lady, with whom an evil spirit even would have found some difficulty in quarrelling, therefore, the merit of the daughter-in-law was questionable; to confess the truth, he had seen sharp and sour looks pass between the sisters-in-law, which he did not think augured perfect amity; so, for all Georgy knew, had the double establishment gone on much longer, war might have broken out.

"I should like to lay a wager," he began one morning, (Mr. Keating liked nothing better than a wager—whether he lost or won was all the same to him, so that he had the pleasure of it). "I must lay a wager with you, Theresa."

And it was, that she would not remain quietly at Seaton for six months.

Theresa took it instantly—she was so certain she should win this time. It was now the beginning of June, and, allowing her time to make the necessary choice of furniture &c. in Town, he then gave her till Christmas, which Chetwode proposed spending with his mother.

“ My wager is this; that before the middle of December you are tired of your rural life, and the excellent Mark will have to take a house for you in Town.”

“ What will you give me if I win?” asked Theresa, “ for a great deal depends on that.”

“ You shall choose what you like—any gem, any jewel, any object of *vertu* you please, the value on no account to exceed, five shillings.”

“ Make it five guineas, and I take you at your word !”

“ Guineas then, for I shall win.”

And now, by the coach which daily passed Major Keating’s gate, arrived the once anxiously-expected Bathurst, a day behind the fair.

Fortunately, the purpose, for which his com-

pany had been solicited, had never been divulged to him, otherwise he might have been mortified, though he could not have been more astonished than he was, when he heard of the purchase made by his friend.

The warm interest, however, with which he entered into the scheme, and his friendly anxiety to see the place and hear all about every thing connected with it, showed how very far from his thoughts was the idea that he should himself have been consulted on the subject, and this relieved Mark of a load of uneasiness.

As the gentlemen sat out on the lawn together smoking their cigars after dinner, he consequently detailed to his friend without any embarrassment, the whole history of his predilection (!) and final purchase.

Keating smiled to himself, behind a wreath of smoke, at the adroit manner in which the husband told his tale, without one allusion to the wife who had been the guiding hand throughout.

"And you really think," asked Bathurst

very naturally, "that you shall like living in the country?"

Mark was annoyed at the expression.

"Every one will call it 'living in the country!'—it is no such thing;—it is merely having a country residence; we must have had a home somewhere, and we both agreed that it was much easier to find a house in Town for the winter, and a few months of the season, than to find an equally eligible one in the country for just the brief period of a summer; now we shall have our fresh home to come down to whenever we like, and the prospect is very enjoyable."

Again his brother-in-law smiled—a smoke-veiled smile;—he admired the innocent sophistry of Mark Chetwode—the simple artfulness with which he had tried to, and succeeded in, persuading himself, that that against which he had fought after his mild fashion till he could stand no longer, was after all an act of his own free choice.

At this moment, Theresa approached the drawing-room window, and gently called "dear Mark."

Dear Mark was to come in directly—he had been sitting quite long enough with the smokers, and they really must forgive both him and herself, but if he remained another minute, he would be quite unbearable for the rest of the evening.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Bathurst hastily opening his cigar-case, "I thought you had one all this time! why did you not ask me?—I declare I thought I saw you lighting yours as we came out—tell Mrs. Chetwode you have not even begun yet!"

But before this message had reached the ears of even he who was meant to deliver it, Mark Chetwode had obeyed his summons, and gone into the house.

"He does not smoke now," said Keating, *sotto voce*.

"No?"

"No—not allowed!"

Bathurst shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing.

"Good many things forbidden now—not permitted much liberty, either of speech or action; this purchase is not *his* you know!"

"No?" exclaimed Bathurst, very much astonished, "I am sorry to hear it! truly sorry."

"*Hen-pecked*, my dear fellow!" ejaculated Keating with a gesture of contempt, "hen-pecked, I give you my word, till he could sooner fly over those trees than dare to say, his soul is his own!"

This, his friend Bathurst had long seen; he had more than suspected it the first evening he had ever been introduced to Theresa, but had tried to close his eyes against the conviction, till they were opened either by others, or by indisputable self-evidence.

Now, by the former means, the veil was dropping, and what he had always feared, from

his intimate knowledge of the yielding amiability of his friend, seemed at last to have come to pass.

Often when they were young men together, the graver Bathurst, always deep-thinking, used to say to himself, "If an intriguing woman, one who wins his affections, once gets hold of Chetwode, he is lost," and, as far as the dignity of a husband's position, and the mastery belonging to the sex, were concerned, the prophecy had come true. The sneer of the brother-in-law had not escaped the keen eye of Chetwode's bosom friend, and he sighed within himself as he thought of it.

The next day, the first thing, the whole party were to go to Seaton together, and a cloudless sky promised that the excursion would be one of the most pleasurable kind. Georgy and her husband were to take old Mrs. Keating and Mr. Bathurst, whilst the devoted Mark, as a matter of course, was to be separated from the rest, to lose the sight of his friend's

first impressions, and to walk through the winding bridle paths of the woods, by the side of the slow and obstinate pony which it was Theresa's pleasure to ride.

For the first time, he felt the walk rather irksome, and then he redoubled his assiduities, lest the fact should be apparent.

Shakespeare says :—

“ When love begins to sicken and decay
It useth an enforced ceremony.”

And certainly we are never so polite as when we feel that we have been remiss, even in thought, so Mark's attentions were that day doubled and trebled too.

When they reached Seaton, the Keatings were standing waiting for them on the lawn, but Bathurst was out on the top of the house, admiring the view, and as Theresa dismounted, she exclaimed with some asperity,

“He need not have been in quite such a hurry, I think!”

How very often a sentence, an expression, a little insignificant word even, has power to disturb one's equanimity, and knock down one's spirits; Mark was not in a merry mood that morning, and this speech made him feel still more uncomfortable—almost unhappy.

During the whole of the inspection, Theresa was a shadow at her husband's elbow; she never suffered himself and his friend to have a moment's conversation out of her hearing; and Bathurst, recollecting what Keating had said the evening before about the purchase being hers, not his, felt a restraint in her presence which very nearly prevented his giving his honest opinion of the house and grounds when asked.

“It is very evident your taste does not agree with ours,” said Theresa, when she observed this hesitation, and Mark looked anxiously for the answer.

"I admire the spot exceedingly," replied Bathurst, "it has great capabilities, and the site is perfect—but I confess I imagined a more finished place—I expected a house ready to be immediately occupied."

"And so it is; it wants nothing but furniture—"

"Pardon me—I was out on the top, and the roof is completely out of order!—I went over the offices too, and the cellar is under water."

Mark was provoked beyond measure at these discoveries, and Theresa was provoked too, but her annoyance was directed towards Bathurst for noticing and commenting on such accidents, putting her husband out of conceit with his purchase, and making him think a world of difficulties lay before him, effectually preventing him, for at least some time, from sitting down comfortably in his own house.

Of course all these things had to be remedied, and Theresa, during the ride home, im-

pressed on Chetwode the folly of thinking that any house in the world, long uninhabited, would not require repair.

There was one fact, however, on which Bathurst did not think it right to have polite scruples; he felt assured that the house was damp, and spoke strongly as to the importance of remedying this to the utmost extent before taking final possession.

Chetwode well remembered that this had been his own first impression, only he had not been permitted to give more than feeble utterance to it. His friend strongly advised his not entering till the hot summer days came round, and suggested the propriety of pleasing Mrs. Mark, by enjoying a little more of the London season till a wise time arrived, in the which to begin country life.

"You took my advice about Cornwall's horses," said he, "when a fearful accident had taught you to do so; do not wait now for the experience which makes one wise, but go up

to Town for at least six weeks. If you want a house, there is the prettiest little bijou to be let for the rest of the season in Curzon Street, that ever you would wish to see. Give me the commission, and I will engage to have it all ready for you in a week."

All the rest of the speech, all save its closing sentence, fell pleasantly on Mark Chetwode's ear, and a deep scheme, such as proposing this plan to Theresa as entirely *one of his own ideas* entered his head; but Bathurst must have nothing to do with it; he very well knew that if he had, it would spoil all. Mark, and Mark only must be the proposer, and the promoter, and Theresa, he trusted, would graciously acquiesce.

Fortunately, she did so, and she liked the plan too, for the excitement of moving about luxuriously without any trouble or any thought of the odious word expense, had become delightful to her. At first she rather hesitated at being six weeks at an hotel, for

Mark had not then divulged the Curzon Street project; he knew if he did, she would immediately ask from whom he had heard of that house, and there would be some objection raised in consequence.

He therefore, with perhaps pardonable subtlety—(he was striving for peace and a quiet life)—offered to write up to an agent and make enquiries, and as this proposal also found favour in the sight of his wife, he told Bathurst, in private, to write and engage the house in Curzon Street.

That feat achieved, they prepared to leave the Keating's, soon to meet again; but ere their departure, Lady Rydal had extorted a promise from them, that after all their business in Town was transacted, they would come and stay at Ringmere, and so be on the spot to place all the furniture according to their fancy, within the walls of their own bright home, called Seaton.

With this understanding, they left the roof

where they had spent so eventful a week, and wended their way towards London, where, very shortly, Theresa was once more plunged in that whirl of pleasure and dissipation in which she seemed so fitted to dwell.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the news of her son's intentions and their fulfilment first reached old Mrs. Chetwode, the nature of her feelings partook more of the character of a shock than a surprise; for it had never entered into her imagination that the precious being, from whom she had never, in the whole course of his life, been separated a sufficient time to form, on the whole, one year—should now, without any preparation, have fixed his head quarters far from her, and in

the country land and that too in such close vicinity to his wife's sister, as to lead her reasonably to fear they would make it more than a mere summer's residence.

The first letter of regret and remonstrance which her gentle hand had ever penned, was despatched to Mark on this occasion, and it cut him to the heart.

He now saw that the two, who, next to Theresa, he loved and esteemed most on earth, disapproved and deprecated the step he had taken, and his mother's argument, that in the course of human nature, the years in which she could now hope to enjoy his society must be dwindling to a close, consequently residing near her would have been as much a happiness to her as a duty of his own, made him bitterly deplore the ill-advised haste with which he had concluded the purchase, and the weak compliance with which he had done so before consulting his mother, or even Bathurst.

To the latter, in secret, he mourned his fault; the first sight of his mother's face had plunged the shaft still deeper in his heart, and though to her he only said, "It was Theresa's anxious wish," to him he confided more, and bitterly repented the rash act.

"Why did you not advise me!—check me!" was his appeal to his friend.

"Because till the deed was done, I never knew it was even in contemplation; when I came down to Keating's, if you remember, no interference of mine could have availed, and so I held my peace."

This was very true, but still Mark felt aggrieved, and the buoyant gaiety of Theresa whirling round in the vortex of occupation and amusement, only saddened him still more.

Possessed of *carte blanche* to furnish Seaton as she pleased, the taste which had been nurtured in Paris, now budded and blossomed in full vigour, and there was nothing rare and

elegant in the costly warehouses of London, which she did not order to be put to her account.

One day, almost wearied out with the various shops she had been in, she closed the afternoon's campaign by going to Howell and James's to have her diamonds arranged in another form. The bandeau which she sometimes wore round her head, had small hooks placed cunningly here and there, so that each gem could be detached, and be re-united by a skilful hand into other shapes; and as Theresa judged that a *sevigné* would be in better taste for country dinners than a bandeau, she waited in the jewellery room, till the transformation was effected.

Seated opposite to a looking glass, she was amusing herself with inwardly remarking on the different groups of odd people who were sauntering round the treasures, when all at once, a gentleman walked up the shop, and leaning across one of the counters, began talking to an attendant with great earnestness.

Theresa could not see his face, but the figure made her start;—Once the profile was nearly turned towards her, and then turned away again, but in another moment the impatient accents in which he spoke, rivetted her attention, and in the voice she knew she was not mistaken.

“I *must* have them,” it said, “for I leave town early to-morrow for the Continent.”

Certain that the speaker was no other than Edward Sydenham,—remembering too, the effect the sight of him had had on her that evening at the Opera when she thought she saw him—an ardent prayer almost escaped her lips that she might not attract his observation, as the shop was full, or, at all events, once more pass unrecognized.

She looked nervously round to see if, by going to the person who was altering her jewels, she might screen herself from his notice, but the busy functionary was close to Sydenham himself, indeed the very eyes of the

latter, who like herself, was waiting, were intent on the arrangement of the scattered gems.

There was no escape!—there she must sit, and trembling and breathless, though she had bent her head over the tray of devices before her, she all at once felt she had not stooped low enough, for a tread had approached from the dreaded quarter, and the footsteps had stopped at the back of her chair.

Unable to bear the suspense of moments which seemed hours, she at last, with a desperate effort, looked up, and their eyes met.

Neither moved; neither spoke;—each stood looking, the one at the other, till suddenly over the well-known face there came the well-known smile, and in a low, distinct, but doubting voice, there was breathed the word,

“Theresa?”

“Is it you?—is it possible?—is it really you?” were the hurried, half-inarticulate expressions in reply, and drawing a chair to her side, he sat down.

The delight that sparkled on every feature—the radiant happiness beaming in his eyes—and the rapid flow of glad sentences which poured from his lips, as he exclaimed upon the months he had lost sight of her, and the joy of beholding her again, paralyzed and confounded Theresa.

Was this his greeting?—he whom she felt she had so wronged?—he to whom she had fancied she was once so dear?—was this his greeting whose love had been outraged and insulted by her marriage, and to the first meeting with whom, she had looked forward with a dread bordering on terror?

When she could collect her thoughts, her first impression was, that the whole manner was assumed; that he was pretending to carry it with a high hand, and that this cool assumption of joyous indifference was his mode of saying to her —“Vengeance is mine!”

And truly if it had been so, her sensations during the early part of that interview, could

he have known them, would have repaid any heart that panted for revenge—but the deception was not of long duration.

Placed where there was little light, the changes of her countenance were not visible, whilst on *his* face, the light of a window above, showed every expression; if he were acting, he was consummate in his art! but it was not so.

“How strange! how singular that we should meet to-day! and by such a mere chance, for I am actually only one day in Town—that is I intended to be only one day—but I must see you where I can talk to you, Theresa! tell you all that has happened since we parted—of course my letter to you was lost—of course you never heard the reason I left Dorchester so suddenly—my aunt’s death; you never heard from me, did you, Theresa?”

“Never,” was the choked answer, a crowd of dreadful fears of what was about to be disclosed rushing into her mind, yet utter inabi-

lity to comprehend the spirit in which he was addressing her, still troubling and confusing her.

“ I was sure you never did ; but are you alone here ? ” and he glanced round the shop anxiously. Though an answer in the affirmative was evidently what he wished, it was not the reply he seemed to expect, and for a moment he looked surprised ; the next, he was again rattling on : “ I cannot, here, tell you all the provoking adventures that detained me in Ireland ; I can only say how I have tried and tried to trace you since you left the Keating’s, and all in vain ! when to-day—by the bye, once I thought I *had* found you.”

“ Where ? ” asked Theresa, quickly.

“ At the Opera, one night—but it could not have been you.”

“ Why not ? ”

Sydenham laughed, and asked her not to be offended.

“ The fact was, I looked at your likeness a

long time, and at last I observed a broad band of diamonds round her head—that undeceived me. But to continue; to-day, my last day in Town, as I intended it to have been—I came into this Vanity Fair for some studs they have been re-setting, and my attention was attracted by seeing one of the men unpicking a band of diamonds; strange to say, they reminded me of you, and stranger still, when I asked to whom they belonged, he said, to “Mrs. Chetwode!”

Theresa started; she felt convinced now that all the past was forgotten—that perhaps she had herself been deceived, and that the love she had fancied was so deep, so deathless, was but the affection of long years of acquaintance, roused to more than its real warmth on one occasion, but subsiding after that, into the brotherly tenderness of friendship.

How bitter this conviction was, could best be told by her cheek, turning whiter and whiter, and her hand, shaking perceptibly;—

but none could know the inward effect of a dialogue which she began to look upon as cruelly heartless; none but herself could know the sickening sinking of her heart as she listened.

"Yet," said she to herself, "let him go on—the worst is over."

"To continue my long story, the name of Chetwode brought you back still more to my mind, for I remembered some excellent, primitive old people, a mother and son, I think, or something of that sort—with whom you were once staying in Hill Street."

Theresa held her breath—what was the meaning of this? what could he mean? how could he mention thus, her husband and his mother!

Before, however, the succeeding sentence had been half uttered, the truth flashed across her, and she grasped the back of the chair on which Sydenham was leaning. It was close to her so the action did not strike him.

"He went away directly, or I really think I should have made a fool of myself by asking after Mrs. Dering, as if Mrs. Dering, and Mrs. Chetwode's diamonds bore some intimate relation to each other!"

"Heaven help me!" ejaculated Theresa to herself; "then the worst is not over! he does not know I am married!"

At that moment, the studs were brought, and Theresa was left to think of the dreadful predicament in which she was placed. What was she to do? how was she to act? it was getting late, and they were almost the only people left in the shop; suppose Chetwode, in his walk home from the club, should see the carriage, and, as he often did, enter the shop with the intention of accompanying her home, what would he say when he found who was her companion?

Trembling from head to foot, longing to start up and escape, yet bound as it were by a spell to remain and hear all, she sat still, and

then came another terror upon her—the terror lest her diamonds should be brought to her, and her change of name betrayed. This, therefore, she resolved to prevent, and hastily rising, she crossed the shop, with limbs that seemed as if they must sink beneath her, and addressing the person who was still occupied on the *seigné* she desired that it might be ready for her the next day, for she could not then wait for it.

Again Sydenham was at her side.

“You are not going, Theresa? going without one word?”

“Oh no,” said she, faintly, “only—only hurrying—”

“Then when shall I see you again, and where?—where are you staying that I may call?”

“You promise to call?” exclaimed Theresa in a wild, strange voice, “you promise?”

“Can you doubt it? and to think of my never having asked after Mrs. Dering! you have put everything out of my head.”

"Mamma is quite well, thank you—she has settled in Paris ever since my—my sister's marriage—"

"Really? I hope Georgy is well too; I heard she was to marry Keating; but where are you in town?"

This was the moment; few would have met it as did Theresa! She took a pencil and paper, and bending down so that he should not see the words she was tracing, she wrote:

"Ask at No. —, Curzon Street, for Mrs. Mark Chetwode—there, and by that name you will find

"THERESA."

"There," she hurriedly exclaimed, twisting up the paper and crushing it into his hand, "you have promised to me once to-day, and I now require you to do so once more—till my—till the carriage in which I am—is out of sight, do not look at what I have written; it is

my address, but one so strange, that I charge you not to read it till I am out of sight—and now, one more word—remember your first promise !”

She sprang into her carriage ; how she found her way to it, she hardly knew—she threw herself in without venturing one more look, and before she had drawn one calm breath, or half recovered her composure, she was safely deposited at her own door.

In the silence of her own room she sat down to think over the past, and tremble at the prospect of the future, for the meeting she had enjoined on him, now took a formidable form, although much of the pain and humiliation of it was removed by her accidental discovery of the loss of her letter, resigning him.

That most fortunate circumstance was the happiest, for her credit, that could possibly have befallen her, for it placed her, on the side of the injured, and him, in the light of the deceiver.

What the sequel would be, she did not venture to think ; she could hardly collect herself sufficiently indeed, to think about anything, except that they had met, and were to meet again.

And now, should she tell her husband ? that was the next perplexing question ; should she let him know that one, whose name, so artfully mentioned in Paris by Mrs. Bellingham, had already engendered disagreeable feelings, very nearly amounting to suspicions, had re-appeared upon the scene ? was there any use in reviving a subject on which she knew that Chetwode was sensitive ? was it, in short, worth while to embitter his cup with a drop which his peculiar nature had once before converted into gall ?

No ! on serious consideration, she determined that it was not !—when Sydenham called, doubtless a card would be left for Mark, and that would introduce the name far better than she could do it herself—consequently she resolved to say nothing about the meeting.

“And as to his questioning me,” was her inward reflection, “Supposing by any chance he should have heard of it, he dare not! he values his ‘peace and a quiet life’ too much! so thus far I am safe.”

It was unlucky—unlucky beyond words, that this should have been the resolution at which Theresa had arrived, for, as it happened, her interview had not been unobserved. Eyes, unfriendly and severe, had watched the scene, and a heart, filled with rancour, had treasured up each look and action.

In another part of the shop, concealed by laces, silks, and floating finery of all description, Madame D’Esterville had sat, making purchase after purchase that she did not want, for the express purpose of arming herself with a weapon of revenge against her beautiful and haughty rival.

She saw the meeting—she saw the scene—she saw Theresa leave the shop with Sydenham at her side, and she watched her into her

carriage; the note too that had been placed in his hand, she saw him open, and as she entered her own carriage, the agonized expression of his face on reading it, was not lost upon her.

Her way home was in a contrary direction to that taken by Theresa, therefore, as she turned into Pall Mall, the first person she met was Mark Chetwode, walking leisurely along towards Waterloo Place, and she stopped her carriage.

Rather startled at seeing a lady kissing her hand to him out of a carriage window, Chetwode at first hesitated, and looked round to see if any one more likely than himself could be the object of such amiable condescension; but the greeting was repeated, and he then recollected Madame D'Esterville.

She was, as usual, full of words and enquiries, and asked where he was staying in town?

"I need not ask how Mrs. Chetwode is, for I have just seen her, looking better and brighter than I ever remember."

"Really?" replied Mark interrogatively, for that was the first sentence she had breathed that had any interest for him. "You have seen Theresa? then I hope I may still overtake the carriage—where was it?"

"She is gone home, I think; I was in Howell and James's, and so was she, so I witnessed the prettiest little scene in the world! a meeting between her and her old love, Captain Sydenham; but perhaps I had better not detain you—in Curzon Street, you say you are? very well; I shall call to-morrow without fail! Adieu."

And well satisfied with her day's work, comprised in the brief space of the last few minutes, Madame D'Esterville went on her way rejoicing.

And Mark Chetwode? with a chilled heart, a changed spirit—grief and jealousy gnawing at his very soul, and the whole face of nature darkened to him by those few words, he also went his way, but not rejoicing. He was

troubled in his mind to that degree that he felt he could not enter his home; he could not meet that fair young face, unless he could assure himself that the clear eyes would look into his own with the open glance of truthfulness so essential to his peace. He could not bear the thought of seeing her, till he had said over and over again to himself, "She will tell me! she will not conceal it from me!" and then he once more turned towards home.

As he walked along, the by-gone year of his married life seemed spread out before him, and he lived every hour over again. Yet could he not recall one single moment, in which the conduct of Theresa had given him, even uneasiness! the whole of his misery had been caused by what others had said, not by her, and, therefore, as he reached his own door, he had almost decided that he would not be the first to speak; at all events he would wait and see how she looked!

Dinner, however, was announced before she

appeared, and then her place was at end of the table, where every feature was in deep shadow. She laughed and talked, and asked him who he had seen in the course of the day, all, just as usual! but the cloth was hardly removed before she rose, saying, that she must prepare for the Opera.

Mark's countenance fell.

"I had so hoped by your dress, that I was to have the pleasure of your society this evening, Theresa!"

"Oh, my dress? why, I certainly generally dress before dinner, only to night I have promised to go to a ball too, so I thought I would dress for both at once."

Mark was silent; this was not the first time that he had felt his home very dull, but till now, the sense of loneliness had not been so oppressive, and his sigh was so deep and bitter, that Theresa paused at the door.

"Do you wish me not to go out to-night?" she asked, in a hesitating voice.

"I wish you to do what pleases you," was his answer.

"Nay, but to-night I can afford to be unselfish, for, to tell you the truth, I do not care whether I go out, or stay at home."

How warmly, on any other occasion, would Mark Chetwode have acknowledged this self-sacrifice! but this evening he could not; a barrier of ice had risen up between him and her, and he merely repeated his request that she would do whichever she liked best.

Piqued by his coldness, she ordered her carriage to come round in an hour, and left the room, whilst he who remained behind watched her retreating figure, and watched even the very door through which she had vanished, till it was nearly time for her to return again.

And at last she re-entered; radiant in her beauty, and looking proud in the consciousness of it; how different to him, as he sat there, his elbows on his knees and his head bowed between his hands; sad, silent, and dispirited!

He felt the contrast and it saddened him still more. What had he in common with that bright being? what had he ever had?—and yet, she had certainly accepted him voluntarily; there had been no consultations—no correspondence—no compulsions; and yet, everyone told him—at all events everyone could tell him on the smallest encouragement—that she whom he so worshipped, had “an old love!”

He shuddered as the obnoxious phrase recurred to him, for the point on which he had always been most anxious in his selection of a wife was, single-hearted devotion to himself!—He had coveted a young, fresh heart; one, pure, and unscathed by the world; one two, which had known no other love, and once, he thought he had found the prize.

It was the fading-away of this day dream that was now torturing him; every hour and every accumulating circumstance, now convinced him that he had not been chosen from the same motives which had influenced his own

choice, but that some mystery lay beneath Theresa's acceptance which he might never know; some sunken rock, on which, sooner or later, he must strike, without the power of even preparing himself for the shock, because, —*he dared not question her!*

There, in that one sentence, Theresa showed her knowledge of his character, and her consciousness of supremacy. She had said—"He dare not question me," and safe behind that bulwark, she that evening, seeing and suspecting that something was wrong, actually said to him with the intention of eliciting the truth.

"What is the matter with you to-night!—one would think I were going to leave you for ever, instead of for a few hours."

But he could not joke on the subject; it was too bitter; it might be a small matter to her to joke about *his* love, so deep, so unchangeable! but hers was not so to him;—it was his life, his being, his very all! and, rather than reply

in the same strain, he turned it off by noticing her bouquet.

“How beautiful it is—where did you get it?”

“Madame Jullien made it up for me.”

The word “Madame” brought Madame D’Esterville instantly to his recollection, and with a sudden effort he said—

“That reminds me—have you seen anything of Madame D’Esterville since we have been in Town?”

“No, I have not;” was her answer, “why do you ask? is she in Town?”

Now was this ignorance, truth? Mark Chetwode doubted!—Madame D’Esterville certainly had not in plain words said she had spoken to Theresa, but she had inferred it, so Mark’s rejoinder was—

“Do you not know she is?”

“I?—not I?—if I did, why should I conceal it? do you suppose I should be afraid of telling you that I had seen her?—upon my

word, Mark, you are very odd to-night; I think before you begin questioning *me*, you had better answer for yourself; pray how did you know she was in Town?"

"I met her—I saw her, Theresa."

"Did you speak to her?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then why did you not say so before?"

Mark saw his mistake, and hesitated, so that before he had found an answer, his wife was again speaking;—

"Unless her words were strictly private, not to be repeated, not to be mentioned—like your meeting!—may I ask what she said?"

Oh! how cuttingly, how coldly, fell these contemptuous words on the ear of Chetwode! he felt them pierce him like tiny arrows, each entering a nerve and thrilling to his heart, but this time he did not hesitate so long.

"She told me she had just seen you—I fancied she said, just parted from you; that is all."

Theresa considered; she was "putting things together" in her own mind. She was comparing her husband's altered manner of that evening with the circumstance of his having somewhere encountered Madame D'Esterville; Madame D'Esterville had "just seen her"—she had inferred that she had "just parted from her"; she had met Mark, doubtless on his way home, and he had knocked at his own door within half-an-hour after Theresa had herself reached it, therefore the most probable conclusion was, that Madame D'Esterville had been in Howell & James's at the same time with herself, and thence, her husband's altered manner!"

Theresa had got the key; she knew she had; but still standing firm on the conviction that Mark Chetwode dared not question her, she carried it with a high hand. There was but one more fact to be elicited, and that was, where had Madame D'Esterville seen her?—if she could but discover that, she should know all, and take measures accordingly. Mark's

jealousy once aroused, must be appeased and the wound smoothed over; but, should she be mistaken—should the concealed interview have been un-witnessed and herself safe, the future must be regulated with the strictest care, in gratitude for the escape she had had!

“And where did she see me?” she accordingly asked, “for I never saw *her*.”

The husband was silent;—how could he answer that question?—would it not be tacitly publishing his own moral cowardice in not venturing to be open with his wife, and not asking her at once “Have you seen Captain Sydenham to-day?”

If he said, “she saw you in Howell & James’s” it would be placing both himself and Theresa in a painful position—he, for not saying he knew of the meeting—she, for not avowing it; and so he merely replied—

“Upon my word—*I forget!*”

In that answer Theresa achieved another triumph, and possessed herself of another

weapon. From that moment she no longer dreaded her husband's eye, any more than she feared his words.

The former, she felt that she could turn from, and the latter, she knew he dared not use! and so Madame D'Esterville, although she thought she had had her revenge, had only exalted the guilty, and sent the shaft with all its deadly poison, deep into the heart of the innocent, where it lay rankling.

CHAPTER V.

THAT evening, Theresa was in wild spirits. At the opera first, and then at the ball, she enjoyed her full measure of admiration, and forgot in the excitement of the time, him who sat alone at home, musing and grieving over her frivolity and heartlessness.

In the course of her career, she had struck up a violent friendship with a little widow, a Mrs. Templar, gayer and more volatile even

than herself, and this indefatigable little votary of pleasure was her companion everywhere. She used to introduce Theresa to her associates as "my insensible friend," and often laughed heartily at her, for having no love affairs.

"Life would be so tame to me," said she as they drove from the Opera-House together that evening, "so very 'stale, flat, and unprofitable,' if I did not get up a little *tendresse* now and then for some one; I always did in my husband's time, though he was the best of men; and now, in all my glorious liberty, I do not see why I should cease to amuse myself."

"But I amuse myself very well, and yet I have no *tendresse*," smiled Theresa.

"But you must have, some day, my dear child! you can never go on in this insensible way for ever; I never think of going to a ball without having at least three partners ready for me, all waiting on the staircase, but you

never have any but admirers!—pshaw! admirers! that is very milk and water, Theresa.”

But Theresa was of a different opinion; she had once loved too well to be able to love as lightly as Mrs. Templar, yet she guarded the secret so jealously, that not even those lynx eyes had as yet discovered it.

Four o'clock in the morning struck before the beautiful Mrs. Chetwode was permitted to declare she would dance no more, and then she insisted on going home.

In the room where her shawl was hidden away, the pale, cold light of morning put the candles to shame, and as she was stepping into her carriage, an early milk-woman stopped to look at her, and screeched the quality of her merchandise in her ear.

The early carts, too, of the market gardeners, met her at every turn, and she felt her eyes and cheeks burn with heat and weariness, as she looked at the fresh ruddiness of the children perched upon the cabbages.

“Do not knock,” she exclaimed as the carriage stopped, for she thought her husband must have been asleep for some hours, instead of which, as she ascended the stairs, he stood at the top, ready to receive her.

There was his outstretched hand and kindly smile, just as if he had forgotten and forgiven all, and as he drew a chair for her to sink into, and placed sandwiches and wine and water by her side, she very nearly exclaimed aloud,

“This is better than a lover after all ! Mrs. Templar’s lovers would not have sat up till five in the morning, at home and alone !”

And there they sat, chatting and going all over the ball again, till nearly another hour had passed, after which Theresa insisted on not saying another word, for Victor had already looked in once or twice.

She ascended therefore to her room, but as she stood before the glass, she missed an agraffe of diamonds from the place it should have

occupied, and returned to the drawing-room to seek it. At the door she again met Victor, with the missing jewel in one hand, and in the other, a small note.

It never occurred to Theresa till afterwards, that, quite contrary to his usual custom, Victor had intruded on the *tête-à-tête* of herself and her husband strangely often that evening, and she had attributed it to his anxiety to secure the wine, and go to bed.

When, however, she saw that note, her heart misgave her, and she remembered the days when Victor would dodge in and out of the room in exactly the same manner, to intimate to herself and Georgy that he was the bearer of some polite attention of which Mrs. Dering was not to be informed. These days were now gone by for ever, yet he seemed ready to keep up the same system when occasions offered, and how could she put a stop to it?—she could not!—she felt that, right or wrong, she must see what that note was, and

taking it as silently as it was presented, she flew upstairs, and tore it open by the undrawn curtains of the window.

With her conscience loudly upbraiding her for her ingratitude—with a sense of the treachery of her conduct thrilling through every vein, she read the very few lines contained in that note, and stood trembling as she read—

“ The shock of the announcement you made me to-day, I will not attempt to describe. My existence is blighted for ever. Under such harrowing circumstances, surely it were better for both of us not to meet again, but if you think otherwise, you will say so. ”

“ E. S.”

Yet, in spite of her better nature, Theresa was in that excited and bewildered state just then, that she rather rejoiced at the receipt of this note than otherwise ; it showed the power she still possessed, and, thanks to Mrs. Templar's acquaintance and counsels, she looked upon the affair as an episode to be proud of—

a feather in her cap—a romance too tempting to be allowed to die a natural death—anything, in fact, rather than an abyss yawning at her feet, yet from which it was still possible and easy to turn, could she but resolve to do so.

Upon that note and its perplexing contents, she slept the restless, feverish sleep which generally follows a night of glare and gaiety. The mid-day sun was trying hard to penetrate the closed shutters of her room, when, unrefreshed and still weary, she rose and endeavoured to recollect, over her solitary chocolate, all that had passed the preceding day, for a weight was on her mind as though some particular circumstance had occurred, although at first it would not come clearly back to her memory.

Suddenly she recollected—it was the note!—yes—the interview, the Opera, the ball,—all these were nothing—but it was the note, and she caught it eagerly from its hiding-place

to read it over once more, and see whether her impressions on that re-perusal answered with those of a few hours before.

Theresa was very young ; she was inexperienced too, as far as regarded the case in point, yet a something within told her, that the possession of a note like that in her hand, did not partake of the victorious triumph with which, as a girl, she used to evade her mother's watchful eye and receive billets-doux concealed in every possible shape and manner.

Then, she used to glory over her successful artifices ;—*now*, shame mingled with her satisfaction, and though she felt certain that if she confided the secret to Mrs. Templar she should receive nothing but rapturous support and encouragement, the approbation of her own heart was wanting, and the half-smothered voice of her conscience kept exclaiming—

“ All wrong !—wrong—wrong ! ”

She knew she was wrong in even sitting with that note in her hand, deliberating. She

knew that she ought rather to have torn it instantly into a thousand pieces, and thanked her guardian angel for the protecting words—"it were better for both of us not to meet again."

But her strength of mind was not equal to this; she wished, pined, longed for one more meeting to see what view Sydenham had taken of her marriage; to judge if he knew enough to call her conduct "desertion," and in fact to ascertain to what point her power over him still extended!

Vanity was at the bottom of this;—not vice—but vanity and the ill effects of evil companionship; Mrs. Templar stood before her mind's eye; Mrs. Templar's words, and Mrs. Templar's ridicule haunted her, and in the depths of her heart there lurked the fervent wish that that volatile and satirical friend should see and be satisfied that though she had laughingly declared that Theresa had only admirers, and no lovers, one did exist, as deep, as earnest, and

as true, as any one of those who professed, so loudly, to adore the fair and frolicsome widow.

So it ended by her sending for her friend ; she had something very particular to say, and wished she would call in the course of the day —any hour, as Theresa did not intend to go out, unless Mrs. Templar would take a drive with her.

And they drove out to Kensall-green ; there in the peaceful cemetery, where all was still and silent round them, where the very hum of the world seemed hushed into a sleep as profound as that of the countless slumberers to which the place was dedicated, Theresa told her story, receiving in her turn sympathy, advice, (such as it was) and, as she had expected, the warmest approbation and encouragement !

“ You have not answered it ? ” the widow asked, turning the note over and over, with sparkling eyes.

“ No ; and apparently no answer was ex-

pected," said Theresa, "for there is neither date nor address."

"Then you know where he lives?"

"Indeed I do not; he told me he was merely passing through Town—but I think I could find out."

"How?"

Theresa rather hesitated, but she knew she had better have the credit of voluntarily telling all, than suffer Mrs. Templar to extract every atom of information, piecemeal, which she would; therefore Victor's name was uttered, and his universal knowledge proclaimed.

"Victor is sure to know—he always does."

This was more delightful still; Mrs. Templar thought that the thicker the plot grew, the more charming it was, and she began to lay her plans accordingly.

"Then, my dear, there can be no difficulty at all; you must write your note, and put no address—leave that to Victor."

“ But what am I to write ? am I to ask him again to call ? ”

“ Not in a plain, straightforward way, but you must let him see that you wish it—that you value his acquaintance, and wish to retain him as a friend.”

Theresa half smiled, and half incredulous, shook her head, yet she felt that if Sydenham could ever really be her friend, it would be a great happiness ; she was still young enough to fancy such a thing possible ! and Mrs. Templar’s specious, soft, deceiving words, were honey to her ear.

But the widow misunderstood Theresa’s expression of doubt and sadness ; she thought the doubt applied to Sydenham’s future friendship, and the sadness to memory, of the past, so she ran on—

“ Do not think of what has gone by, Theresa ; begin your acquaintance with him anew, as it were ; make a friend of him, and do not drop a valuable acquaintance for the

sake of girlish recollections, and girlish romance; this is your moment, so strike while the iron is hot, and bring him back to your feet, *as a friend*; do not allow him to suppose that he has still such power that you actually cannot meet him again! do you know, my dear child, I call his inference "that it were better for both not to meet again" *tant soit peu* impertinent!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Theresa; "recollect that he thinks I married from pique at his own neglect; that since that neglect has proved to be accidental, he very naturally fears it may be painful to me to see him."

"To see what you have lost!" laughed Mrs. Templar; Theresa could not bear her friend's sarcastic laugh. "Well! that is flattering, certainly; but it only convinces me still more that I am right in advising you to recall him; let him see you in your own house—surrounded by all that wealth can give."

Theresa sighed bitterly.

"Yes," pursued Mrs. Templar, "and never sigh before him like that! let him see that you really wish to make him your friend, and above all, never let him think you regret him as a husband."

"Nay!" exclaimed Theresa—"trust me for valuing my own dignity too much for that! had not my last letter to him been lost, he would have seen that he was refused!"

"Better then, that it *was* lost, for a man never quite forgives the woman who refuses him, and he would have had a spite against you for ever; as it is, you are still a divinity."

"If you could but be serious," began Theresa.

"But I am, my dear child! never was more so in my life; and I wish to impress on you the necessity of showing Captain Sydenham, that you are an exceedingly happy woman, with a husband who has at least twenty good years of life in him, and who has neither wish nor intention of making room for a successor."

Theresa tried to laugh, but it was very forced, and she went wandering on through the labyrinth of glittering tombstones, lost in thought.

Her friend was too volatile ; she felt it now for the first time, and her gaiety was oppressive. The laughing reference too, to the death of a husband who had been good and kind to Theresa far beyond her deserts, jarred on the young wife's heart, and she sincerely wished at that moment that she had neither met Sydenham, nor received any communication from him, as in that case the confidence which she had been obliged to make, and which she now regretted, might have been avoided altogether.

It is troublesome to hear a secret—it is dangerous to tell one ; secrets are delicate treasures, and the only repository for the secrets of a married woman should be the ear of her husband.

Theresa knew enough of right and wrong to see that all the pain and perplexity of her present position would have been obviated, could

she, at the first, have found courage to say to Chetwode,

“I have seen Captain Sydenham again, and I feel that you should know how we were once placed with regard to each other.”

After that simple confession—a confession which could entail no possible blame on herself—the showing of a note in which there was not a word to tell to the discredit of either, but rather to the credit of him, would have been a matter of no difficulty whatever. The moral courage would have come to her aid in abundance after the first effort had been made, whilst now, the concealment had begun, and the system must be continued. A secret had been formed, fostered, and finally imparted to another—that other, not her husband. Theresa was consequently in the power of her friend; a tool in her hands, and a toy for her to play with, than which no one was more sensible than Mrs. Templar herself, so whilst the latter

was gay and elated, the former was sad and humiliated.

And thus she went home.

On the back of a visiting card, Mrs. Templar had scrawled a rough copy of the sort of note that the occasion required, and before Theresa met Chetwode at dinner, it was written and placed in Victor's charge.

"You know where to take it?" was all she said, and, as she expected, a brief affirmative was returned.

Now, how did he know? how could he know? how was it that he took it as though he had been looking for it, and exhibited neither surprise nor hesitation.

Theresa asked herself all this as she was dressing to dine in Hill Street, and so nervous did the prospect of what answer it would elicit, make her, that she was pale, tremulous, and abstracted all the evening.

Mark asked her where she had been driving,

and she said she had been walking, which made him think she had over-fatigued herself.

"Where did you walk, dear Theresa?" was Mr. Chetwode's natural question, and her pause, ere she replied, was caught up by Mrs. Bellingham, who sat watching every word that fell from her lips, for she also, had seen Madame D'Esterville.

"In Kensall Green Cemetery," was the answer at last, "it is very beautiful there."

"What?" cried Mrs. Bellingham, "all alone amongst the tombstones? no wonder you have got the blue devils, or what you call them! What do the French call them, Mary Vere?"

"*Vapeurs noir*," said the prompter.

"I never have such a thing—I leave them to old people," retorted Theresa, "for I do not consider myself a subject for such companionship; besides, as it happens, I was not alone, Mrs. Templar was with me."

"Humph—the widow of old Aubrey Tem-

plar—I know all about her; she played her cards very well, for I remember when I would wear no shoes but those her father made!”

“You surely are mistaken,” said Theresa, colouring.

“I am never mistaken,” returned Mrs. Bellingham, “because I never say what I cannot prove. She married old Aubrey Templar at seventeen, and he left her a rich widow at twenty; she is as wise as she is witty, for she has not married again; I have nothing to say against her though, except that she was always a sharp girl.”

“She has lived in the first society, at all events,” continued the friend of the absent, “and I find her delightful.”

“If Mark does not object to your knowing her, I need not,” said the old lady, settling herself in an easy chair. “And though I cannot say I ever encourage low people to rise out of their own sphere, others do, and Mrs. Templar has risen by virtue of infinite tact in the first

instance, and great wealth in the second. Her own father left her forty thousand pounds which he had better have left to some one who wanted it more. I abominate guineas that *sent la boutique*—is that the right French, Mary Vere?"

Theresa liked good society herself; she had met "good people" enough to make her appreciate the high bred, and the well born, and she held money in far less estimation than birth and breeding. She saw that good society gave those who moved in it a certain tone to which the *Millionaire* might aspire in vain—there is no mistaking the difference—and this discovery as to her friend's origin was not pleasing to her.

Oh, for Georgy's gentle voice, and firm, kind heart to turn to for advice!—oh, that she had been able to appeal to her, before either betraying her secret to one whose delicacy of mind she now, almost unconsciously to herself,

began to question, or placing herself in an inferior position by asking her for advice.

But the deed was done, and the step taken, and no retrograde movement could be made. Theresa relapsed again into silence, and the evening in Hill Street was, if possible, more dull and more stupid than ever.

She went home, and when the door was opened, she cast a hasty glance beyond the servant, to see if Victor were in the background, but there were no signs of him. She could not ask for him, merely because she never did, and she keenly felt how great a slave duplicity makes one !

In the drawing-room, however, the missing Victor was found, and he was lighting the lamp as Theresa entered ; she looked about—at his hands first—then on the table, the mantelpiece, and the tray, where the customary wine and water stood—but there was no note, and Mark was now settling himself in an easy

chair with a new Magazine, consequently he had the air of a fixture.

“I have brought it on myself,” thought Theresa in despair, as she also took a seat, “why do I fret and worry myself for such a trifle?—he must have been out.”

And she took up a book to try and read till the clock chimed her usual hour of retiring; she was afraid to leave the room a moment before the customary time, for fear of attracting the attention of her husband! Here spoke the guilty conscience! without that, her apparent fatigue the whole evening would have been an ample excuse in Chetwode’s eyes for her going to rest an hour sooner, but that never occurred to her; all she felt was, that on some part of her dressing-table, the note was certainly awaiting her, and till eleven struck, she dared not stir to seek it!

At last the welcome hour came and she started up, and re-acted the same scene upstairs, for the presence of her maid was the same to

her there, as that of her husband had been down stairs—but still she could find no note, nor vestige of one!

She must sleep then—pass the heavy hours of one long weary night—and linger in suspense till the following morning!

It was hard, very hard to bear, yet she had no excuse for speaking to Victor that night, so she must endure her mental sufferings till the right time arrived, and only trust that sleep might soon steep her senses into forgetfulness of the most unhappy day that her life had, as yet, known.

“I have brought it on myself,” was all she could repeat as she closed her aching eyelids; “there is no one but myself to blame—it is my first adventure, and certainly I have, somehow or other, mismanaged it.”

The next morning, the same caution, not to attract attention by rising at any unusual hour, had to be adopted, but here, fortune favoured her. Mark was very late, and as she entered the

dining-room, Victor followed her, with letters on a salver.

Quickly and anxiously she tossed them all over—the expected one was not there, and she looked up at Victor.

“Madame!” he instantly exclaimed, in a low, rapid tone, and answering as though she had questioned him in words, “I took the note myself—but Monsieur was no longer there—he had left early, *en route* for the Continent, and the note is now between those two letters in your hand.”

Theresa turned away—she breathed new life!—a chance had saved her, and the thought which had tortured her conscience for so many hours, was removed like a leaden weight, from her mind.

That her faithful emissary had executed his trust carefully and cleverly, she did not for a moment doubt, but how much had she suffered throughout the lingering time necessary for the secret undertaking to be fully accomplished!

Theresa felt at that moment of relief, as though no temptation should ever again induce her to place herself in a similar position, and bitterly did she now reflect that though saved in the estimation of him to whom the unfortunate note had been addressed, she was not, nor could she ever, except by some humiliating explanation, be cleared of the imputation of a clandestine correspondence, in the inward opinion of her ambassador, Victor.

This was a dreadful idea—an idea so revolting that she would have given worlds to have removed the impression, had it been in her power, but she could not;—she could not stoop so low as that, and she felt that it was the punishment of her fault.

And now anxiety, that restless, wearing anxiety which stamps even young faces with care, began to tell on the smooth, fair face of Theresa; it was anxiety to leave Town; to “flee away and be at rest,” for the last few days had disgusted her with her sojourn, and

she not only longed to leave scenes which had no charm for her, but also pined for the liberty of the country where no eyes would mark her every change of countenance, and no scrutiny be bestowed on her slightest word and action.

Mrs. Bellingham's inquisitorial remarks were often as torturing to her, as they were irritating, for she saw that since they had been in Town, the manner of her husband had undergone a striking change.

Once he was so easy, so careless, so imperturbably affectionate yet *insouciant*, that he merely took note of her goings-on, to approve and admire, not to watch, to suspect, to dread, and if he dared, to censure!—but this latter, he had *not* dared, as yet;—now, he was silent, observing, sometimes even suspicious, and to whom could Theresa attribute a disposition so foreign to his own, if not to the insinuations and machinations of Madame D'Ester-ville, and his aunt Bellingham?

That he should be removed from this dan-

gerous communication—that she should remove him in time to re-assert, and re-assume that power over him which she was resolved not to yield without a desperate struggle, was now her fixed determination, and the sooner the better; therefore, although more than a week of their intended stay in Curzon Street still remained, Theresa exerted herself to conclude all their furniture arrangements; after that, she drew from Mark a reluctant consent that she should write to Lady Rydal and announce their intended arrival, and though he himself would have thanked her from his heart for the additional week to be devoted to his mother and family, instead of the penance of shopping, his wife was resolved this should not be, and they consequently prepared to leave Curzon Street immediately on receipt of Lady Rydal's reply.

That reply, containing a cordial welcome, did not fail to arrive, and it was now the last evening. Theresa had graciously consented to

drink tea in Hill Street, but had negatived the invitation to dine, as she had a great deal to arrange and could neither dine out herself nor permit her husband to leave her. Consequently, in moods which very nearly approached the ever-to-be-dreaded "monotonous silence" of a married pair, they sat over their *tete-à-tete* dinner, and had just begun to think of rising from the table, when a knock at the street door, quick, low, and tremulous, startled them from their quietude, and announced, at that unseemly and unexpected hour, a visitor.

CHAPTER VI.

“IT must be a mistake—it cannot be for us,” was the natural exclamation of both husband and wife, as they waited in that sort of trepidude which always attends such unexpected events, for Victor to open the door—“it is some one going to dine at some adjoining house—we are early ourselves to-day.”

But these consolatory speeches were of little avail; they neither deceived each other, nor themselves, for instead of the speedy shutting

of the street door, which would betoken the mistaken diner-out, Mark and Theresa could plainly hear that it was wider open even than usual, and Victor, in his own voluble tongue, was welcoming the arrival in his blandest and most exclamatory manner.

The husband glanced at his wife, and she at him again, and each almost held their breath, when suddenly the door opened...a light airy figure glided in...not a syllable was uttered...but Theresa was instantly clasped in an embrace of such long duration, and energetic repetition, that half stifled, she could hardly extricate herself.

“Mamma!” burst from her astonished lips, “am I dreaming? or is it really you, Mamma?”

“It is I indeed!” cried the vivacious widow, taking off her gloves, untying her bonnet-strings, and settling herself in the easiest chair which, in her rapid glance round the room, she had been able to select—“no other than myself, come to plague you again, my dearest!”

—and to plague our dear Mr. Chetwode, too, I fear, if I may judge from the expression of his countenance.”

Mark hastily disclaimed the imputation, and tried to put on a face of more satisfaction at the sight of his mother-in-law, yet in his heart he could not help feeling that she could not possibly have arrived at a more inopportune moment.

The mother and daughter were now, naturally enough, seated side by side, in deep and earnest conversation; — Theresa apparently totally forgetful of her engagement to Hill Street, and Mrs. Dering of course, too ignorant of it to think of abridging the interminable details of her domestic grievances, and her endless quarrels with her tradespeople and other dependants.

Before Mark could, by fair or foul means, insinuate to her that this was their last evening in Town, and that the hour had already passed at which they were expected by his mother,

Mrs. Dering was launched into an account of the reasons which had brought her to England.

“The most shameful conduct on the part of the people of whom I hire my small apartments,” she began in a low, rapid voice, yet sufficiently audible for Mark to hear every word—“conduct, my dearest, which will make you indignant!—you know after dear Mr. Chetwode had so kindly permitted me to tenant your *suite* at Meurice’s, I moved into my present domicile, on the understanding that the seventy francs a week which I consented to give for the remainder of the season, should be reduced to fifty for the rest of the year; unlike my usual prudence, having had Mrs. Norman as my witness, I omitted to insist upon a written agreement; the consequence was, that on offering to pay my half year’s rent the other day, the woman had the audacity to charge me *ninety* francs for the season weeks, and seventy for all the rest of the year; this, of course, as you may imagine, strenuously

and firmly resisted, and I was accordingly subjected to all sorts of insolence, besides being served with a *procès* and every other kind of humiliation !”

Mark’s eyebrows, which, during this harangue, had been contracting into an expression of the most undisguised disgust, now frowned down on his mother-in-law in evident disapproval of the whole affair, but she fancied his wrath was directed against her hostess, not herself, so she cordially thanked him for his sympathy.

“I knew, dear Mr. Chetwode, you would feel for me !” she re-commenced, “and I knew, that by coming to England I should find a champion ready and willing to take my part ; thus, without saying a single word to a soul, I put myself into the *diligence* before daylight the next morning, and after the most delightful passage in the world from Calais to Dover, here I am !”

It was now Mark Chetwode’s turn to speak ; he would not now be silenced indeed, for he

had so great a horror of the discreditable resistance of Mrs. Dering to every species of payment, from a milliner down to a milk-woman, that his temper, already considerably chafed, could stand it no longer.

The fatal fruits of his marriage with Theresa, too, were now beginning clearly to manifest themselves, and his Aunt Bellingham's ancient prophecy, that whoever married the daughter, married Mrs. Dering likewise, came back, vividly and provokingly, to his memory.

Added to this, he had a peculiar feeling on the present occasion, which nerved him to a courage of which, at any other time, he would not have proved himself possessed; he had a weapon in reserve for Mrs. Dering, which he brandished high above her head at the first pause, with a bitter triumph, very unlike him.

"You have come to the worst person in the world to assist you," were his cool and cutting words, "you have unfortunately applied to one, Mrs. Dering, who happens to know that

your hostess has the right on her side, and that in opposing her demand, you have done the most unwise act of which you could possibly have been guilty, unless indeed I except your flight, which appears to me as awkward as it is imprudent."

Mrs. Dering first looked startled at this address, and then bewildered; she could not quite tell what to make of the altered manner of her usually mild and *suave* son-in-law, and Theresa turned her proud eyes on him, half in wonder, and half in indignation, but still he was not daunted.

"You may look surprised," he continued, "but you will be sorry, Mrs. Dering, when I prove to you that I do not assert your want of wisdom without very good grounds for doing so; as it happens, I was only yesterday morning destroying a heap of papers, when I came upon a letter of yours to Theresa, in which you actually name the very terms on which you had just engaged your apartments; you use these very words, so you see how very

unfortunate you are in your selection of an advocate; here is the letter itself!—"I am quite
" pleased and satisfied with everything about
" my *pied-à-terre*, excepting, perhaps, the terms,
" which, for my small means, are a little more
" than I feel quite justified in giving, they
" are, ninety francs a week in winter—just for
" the season—and seventy for the rest of the
" year, with the power of under-letting when
" I make my tour of visits."

Mark read this aloud, and then, folding up the letter, quietly looked Mrs. Dering full in the face.

Her confusion was manifest, yet she was adroit enough to conceal it by vehement expressions of regret and surprise.

How she could possibly have been led into such an error—how she could ever have so fully persuaded herself that the lodging-house people were wrong, and herself right! it was altogether the strangest circumstance in the world, and she would scorn to hesitate now, about the payment; certainly her having

quitted Paris so suddenly was most unlucky, but after all, what was she but a poor lone widow? an utter child, as far as regarded matters of business, with no kind adviser like dear Mr. Chetwode, at hand to help her; she now, however, threw herself completely on his invaluable resources—his clear head—his knowledge of the law—and if he would but be so very kind as to write by the very first post, and enclose her debt to the people, with an assurance from her that she had never been so mistaken in her life, and an order that the apartments should be renewed again for another six months, her obligation would indeed be incalculable.

To all this Mark gave a slow and reluctant consent, for he disliked being drawn into any of the discreditable money transactions of Mrs. Dering.

He had now had sufficient experience of her ways, to judge, correctly enough, of her character, and irritated as he was on this particular evening, by her sudden appearance, which

seemed to threaten the frustration of all his plans and arrangements, he at last felt for her a disgust and a contempt, which Theresa saw, before he had half concluded his first sentence.

To that young daughter, her mother's mean and extraordinary disposition—her restless, grasping after every attainable farthing which could by any possibility be cut off and pruned from the rightful bills of all those with whom she had any dealings—her pertinacious squabbling about the merest trifles costing pounds, shillings, and pence—all this had hitherto been clothed for Theresa's eyes in so specious a garb that she could not all at once enter into her husband's feelings, or give her mother credit for half the strange dishonesty—for that is the only word—of her composition.

Theresa had been brought up in that school; she had been present from childhood at all the scenes, in which she was given to understand that her mother was making virtuous resistance against being cheated, and after which she always went away impressed with a conviction

that the world in which she was one day destined to move, was full of nothing but rogues; consequently she could not feel these delinquencies in the same manner as did her husband. Mark Chetwode was straightforward and honest in all his dealings, were they ever so great, or ever so small. No one on earth could have said against him, that he ever hesitated about the amount of any bill, for his bills were so short, and his payments so prompt, that he had never been mixed up in any of those humiliating arguments into which he now began to find himself so resistlessly dragged.

No wonder he was disgusted—no wonder his countenance took that expression of contempt, when, by a few simple words, he laid bare the mean plot which was intended to defraud those who earned their living by letting lodgings, of a sum which their trusting confidence in not preparing a written agreement, had narrowly endangered.

In the irritation of that hour, as he wandered round the table, wondering and fretting as to

what Mrs. Dering were going to do, whether she were going away that evening, or where on earth she meant to locate herself, a resolution arose in his mind, that sooner than allow Theresa to be any longer subjected to the pernicious society of such a mother, he would risk the utmost anger of which his beautiful wife might show herself capable, and positively place a veto against this incessant and most troublesome intrusion.

These agitating thoughts however were very soon dispelled by the sudden and energetic declaration of the lady in question that she had not had an atom since breakfast, and totally overlooking Mark, she addressed herself wholly to Theresa, begging her to allow Victor to bring a tray—any scrap in the world – and a glass of wine, to *her room*, and that if she might be permitted to retire and take off her bonnet, she was sure she should feel quite another person.

Her room! what next? and this was the eve of the Chetwodes' departure from Town! With

almost a groan Mark recollected that there was still a week of the Curzon Street house left on his hands, and that fatal experience had taught him how very soon Mrs. Dering would discover this, and use it to her advantage.

Yet what could he do? what could he say? after all, was it not Theresa's mother? and must he not therefore smile on, and endure?

But how grating were the light, careless tones of her voice on his impatient ear, as she gathered up her baskets and bundles, and prepared to leave the room! how oppressive and sickening to him were those vivacious, frivolous manners, and that never-ceasing gabble, going on like the engine on board a steamer.

"Forgive me for robbing you of my Theresa for an hour or so, dear Mr. Chetwode," she exclaimed, turning round as she reached the door, and sweeping out with a long curtsy, "I have a little communication of great importance to make to her, and I want to get it off my mind."

"I am sorry to interfere," returned Mark, hastily, again spurring up in his new fashion—"but I must request you do not detain Theresa long; we are engaged to spend this, our last evening, at my mother's, and we are already an hour and a half beyond our time; I am sorry to be imperative, but I can only allow you a quarter of an hour, Theresa, in which time the carriage will be at the door."

Mrs. Dering looked at her daughter, and her daughter, in her turn, looked at her husband; the glance of the former was doubting, distrustful, and rather alarmed; that of the latter, firm, flashing, and full of defiance.

"I will come down in a few minutes," were her words, as, passing her arm through her mother's, she heralded her out of the room, "we can then arrange about time—after I have spoken to you," she added, with marked emphasis, and they left the room together.

Uneasy, and feeling that something was hanging over him, Chetwode paced the room in melancholy silence, till the promised 'few mi-

nutes' had elapsed, and true to her word, Theresa descended.

"Now!" said she, closing the door, and advancing towards him with the utmost coolness, "I am at your service as far as explanation goes; what is the matter with you to-night, and what has Mamma done, that, in her daughter's house, she should have to put up with so insulting a reception?"

Never had Theresa hazarded so bold a speech, and never had she put on so mutinous a manner. Chetwode was struck dumb, and upon his gently representing to her the cavalier way in which they were treating his own mother, from whom they had received such constant and so many acts of warmest kindness, the storm that was brewing, burst forth, and the most painful scene that had yet taken place between the husband and wife, was thereupon enacted.

Not by persuasion, entreaty, or any of the various soothing ways of allaying irritability, did Theresa seek to soften her husband towards

her mother, and indeed herself—but by provocation, retort, and defiance, she rather braved his anger, if such it could be called, and plainly told him that nothing should induce her, this only evening of her mother's society, to keep her engagement in Hill Street, not if every mother-in-law in the kingdom were arrayed in arms against her.

It was not the sentiment, which even in his wrath, Mark admitted, was natural enough—it was not that, that so provoked and roused the enduring man; it was the passionate, unamiable form in which it was conveyed; it was the rebellious and vindictive warmth with which it was delivered; this it was that shocked, grieved, and offended him, and the scene grew more and more bitter every moment, till at last the carriage drove round.

Then came the trial of strength—the 'tug of war,' and it was a lottery whether Theresa would vanquish, or her husband succumb, and at last it came to something like a compromise.

If Mark would consent to remain some

days longer in town, Theresa would agree to accompany him that evening to Hill Street ; but if, on the contrary, he persisted in leaving the next morning for Lord Rydal's, according to the original plan, then, nothing should induce his wife to quit her mother, and he was at liberty to make to Mrs. Chetwode whatever excuse he thought most proper and most likely to satisfy her !

If there were one good feeling possessed by Mark Chetwode in a pre-eminent degree over the rest of his excellent qualities, it certainly was, filial love and veneration ; thus, all the cutting severity and bitterness of these speeches can better be imagined than described.

He was heart-wrung—borne down by the chilling weight of the most cruel disappointment, and the most poignant grief, for was not this sad and intemperate scene, death to his high-flown hopes and visions of happiness ? was not this the moment in which all his bright castles in the air were dissipated, and the bark

which bore the precious freight of his loving and devoted heart, wrecked for ever and ever?

After this, what hope had he of any security of happiness? would not the memory of that fatal evening haunt him through life, and tinge even brighter hours with the stinging conviction, that they were but a ray amid the darkness—a temporary gleam to light, with delusive brightness, the gloom which had now descended like a veil, over his existence?

In vain he represented to her that they had fixed their own day of going to the Rydal's; in vain he told her, that, though the kindest and most hospitable of people, still he had not been on those terms of intimacy with them, which would warrant the liberty of fixing a day, and then, without leaving time even for the proper intimation, disappointing them altogether, and not arriving! Theresa was like the 'deaf adder which stoppeth her ears,' and the voice of her husband made no more impression on her than if he had not spoken at all.

"I have given you my conditions," was all she chose to reply, "and you may do as you like; if we put off our journey to-morrow, I will go with you to your tea-drinking, but if you persist in denying me this very trifling gratification, I will not! I have placed Mamma very comfortably in the bed-room at the back of the house, where she will pass a good, quiet night, I hope, and if you chose to offer her your reluctant hospitality for a few pitiful days, I am ready to be an obedient wife; but to be the slave of your will, the poor puppet of your unreasonable demands, my good Mr. Chetwode, nothing shall make me!"

And there stood the beautiful fury, brilliant in the consciousness of her power of making him who loved her wretched, and triumphant at the heart-broken expression of the countenance which turned from her at that moment, as if, in spite of the loveliness of those features and that form, he too truly felt.

"That the coil of the serpent was over them all!"

But he spoke no more; he had done with words, for he saw and felt too well, that love had no dominion over that unsubdued and invulnerable heart; that at all events, the authority of the affections was not his, and that he might as well preach submission to the winds, as hope, by force of influence, to mould Theresa to his will, or even to his lightest wish.

He had now tried every art to attach her to him, and he had failed; he had placed his happiness in her hands, and she had wantonly trifled with, or totally disregarded, the trust; so now the battle was over, and he let the subject drop; he would not tempt her by promises, to accompany him, an unwilling and impatient guest, to the house of that fond mother who was awaiting them so anxiously; he left her to her own course, and taking up his hat without a syllable of farewell, he quietly left the room, and entering the carriage, drove off to Hill Street—alone.

Loving eyes were waiting for him there; eyes that had watched every change of his

countenance from childhood ; that had watched him too long to be deceived by mere manner, or to believe that, when he cheerfully and carelessly made Theresa's excuses, the heart beneath was as light and joyous as the lips were trying to say it was.

Mrs. Bellingham and her companion were the only additions to that party which Mrs. Mark had so contemptuously termed "the tea-drinking," and the former saw in a moment that there had been some matrimonial struggle, before the husband had left home unattended by his wife.

At first she thought it might be vexation at Mrs. Dering's arrival that had so constrained and affected his manner, but a few adroit questions, to which his truthful nature prevented his giving the readiest of answers, soon convinced her of the real state of the case, and with a hardihood which his own mother and sister would never have ventured to assume, she began lecturing him, as in days of yore, on the folly and weakness of his conduct in al-

lowing Mrs. Dering to come and interfere with his arrangements whenever she pleased—for Mark had already hinted at the possibility of their not leaving Town on the morrow.

“Is her society really so enjoyable, that the moment she arrives, you alter all the plans which the entreaties and persuasions of your own family had no power to move?”

Mark answered, that in spite of the great inconvenience the alteration in question would cost himself, it was purely out of consideration for his wife that he had contemplated it, and even now his mind was not at all resolved—it depended very much on Mrs. Dering's movements; and as he said this, he felt quite a chill come over him, for he knew that the alternative of not leaving Town the next day, would be, Mrs. Dering's following them into the country as soon as they were settled in their own home, and taking up her quarters there for as long a time as appeared palatable to her conscience—if she had one.

“And my daughter Rydal?” persisted Mrs.

Bellingham, "have you left her in this pleasing state of indecision?—is she to expect you any day, and every day? or have you written to put her off?"

Mark hesitated. This was the most puzzling part of the whole.

"If it were not for Blanche, and her kindness," said he, "I should be in no perplexity at all, as to what to do; but the post had already gone out when Mrs. Dering arrived."

"Mrs. Dering again!" retorted the old lady angrily, "then you mean that the Rydals still expect you to-morrow?"

"They certainly do; I am truly sorry—that is to say, I shall be, if I am compelled to disappoint them."

"What compels you?" interrupted his persecutor, "have you no will of your own?—are you so infirm of purpose that you actually cannot decide for yourself in so trivial a case as this? is it possible you are going to overthrow the whole economy of a regular and quiet country house, and keep your mother in

a fever of suspense, all night, for the sake of *Mrs. Dering*?—Mark, you are enough to exasperate a saint !”

“ And it is fortunate, my good aunt,” returned Chetwode with a smile in spite of himself, “ that Job did not live in your time, otherwise I doubt if he would have handed down so immortal a reputation to posterity ; but this is a poor way of entertaining you, dear mother, on this our last evening,” he added, advancing to the small table at which his mother sat, “ let us enjoy the few remaining hours, at least in talking to each other.”

Mrs. Chetwode was longing for this opportunity ; she had been watching for it, for the altered looks of that precious son had long filled her mind with anxiety and apprehension.

That he was happy, the blindest could not believe ; but the secret of his “ silent sorrow ” was yet to be discovered ; it was a subject so delicate that even his mother shrank from touching on it, and yet, now at this last interview, she felt that a few judicious words might

perhaps tempt him to confide in her, and also, possibly, lead to some beneficial result.

The difficulty was where to begin?—what point should be attacked first?

With the outward conduct of Theresa, Mrs. Chetwode had long owned to herself she could find no fault; that is, there was nothing in it *to take hold of*, as the saying is. Perhaps she could have been rather more affectionate in manner—perhaps too, she could have made the scrupulous submissiveness which she displayed in public seem less of a duty, and more of a pleasure—but these were omissions which no one could notice—they were beyond the limits of maternal or marital censure, and since Mark made no complaints, it would have been an invidious task for others to find fault.

Nevertheless, it was very evident even to that mild and gentle mother, that Theresa, since her marriage, had adopted a tone, both new and unexpected by her husband; it was evident that, on the unfortunate foundation of a prejudice against Mrs. Bellingham, she had

obstinately refrained from amalgamating herself with his family, and had, on the contrary, a very strong inclination to pull a different way altogether, partly, perhaps, to show her power.

To aid in this laudable endeavour, it now began to appear that Mrs. Dering's assistance was called in, for certainly whenever that wily widow's star rose in the horizon, something annoying was sure to take place.

Mark Chetwode distrusted the smooth oiliness of his mother-in-law; he always felt, in her presence, as though he were standing on quicksands, and her long and secret conferences with her daughter, the subjects of which never transpired unless in the form of a request for some sort of assistance in pecuniary matters, annoyed and irritated him beyond measure, though he did not like to say so.

From the earliest date of his marriage, this reluctance to speak, when words were necessary for the maintenance of both his dignity and his authority, had been the rock on which he had split, and now, often and often he felt

how weak he had been, yet, how irreparable was the fault!

Sometimes he would argue with himself, and ask what Mrs. Dering had done? and then he could think of nothing positively reprehensible, except that she had prophesied the failure of the arrangement of the double establishment in Hill Street.

This was a sore subject. Why had she done this? how had she gained the foresight? why had she not equally prognosticated that the united home of the Keatings would also fall to the ground, and that there also, it would be, "a house divided against itself?"

No; she had reserved her prescient knowledge for the doomed house in Hill Street alone, and she had been right; consequently, without at all trying to solace himself with the reflection that the breaking-up there, had been painful to his wife and to his mother, Chetwode merely turned still more against Mrs. Dering, and wished from the depths of his soul, that

the "small apartments" in Paris, of which she was so incessantly boasting, were indeed what she professed they were, her *pied-à-terre*!

But to return to the tea-drinking group—As Mark seated himself at his mother's table, Mrs. Bellingham turned to make Marian her audientress, and their conversation being of the most animated description, Mrs. Chetwode took advantage of the noise to relieve her mind of its burden.

Kindly and tenderly she spoke to her son of his yielding indulgence towards his young wife; in itself, his devotion did him credit, but there was even in that, a medium to be observed, and she implored him, for the sake, both of his own and Theresa's future happiness, to draw a line in time, between affectionate compliance, and weak subservience; she entreated him to stop whilst he could; to endeavour to gain an ascendancy over that giddy spirit, and tears rose to her eyes as she tremulously asked him, if he did not think he might be more powerful,

if he could but summon courage to begin at once and show himself, master?

On his folded arms, Mark Chetwode leant his head, unable at first to reply; what could he say?—what excuse, indeed, could the stricken conscience offer, for having let go the reins so long, that eyes which had had but few opportunities of judging, had discovered his total inability to assume them again!

“My dearest mother,” was all he could answer—“this is a bitter and a painful theme, and I cannot dwell on it; if I possess no influence over Theresa, believe me it is not that I have lost it; it is, that I never had it! To you only, of all the world, would I confess so much, and to you only, do I further declare, that even if time should prove me still incapable of gaining that ascendancy over her which I should have wished to have been the result of her affection alone, I can hardly be more broken-hearted than I feel at this moment!”

His mother took his unresisting hand and

held it in hers, but she could not speak, for her tears were choking her. Oh, if he had but listened, to her warning voice, it never would have come to this ! but it was too late to think of that now.

There was one secret lurking at the bottom of Mark Chetwode's breast though, which no power could have called to life ; there was one drop down there, to which gall and wormwood would have been sweet in comparison...one question which sometimes agonised him, because he would rather have died than suffer the answer which tried to force itself upwards, to present itself—it was, if he had never possessed any influence over Theresa's mind, any hold over her affections, was there any soul in the wide universe, who *did* ?

When he left Hill Street that evening, it was with the promise, that its inmates should be informed in the morning betimes, what arrangements had been made, and Mark drove home, inwardly convinced that he should find on his return, that everything had been settled

between Theresa and her mother, and that most probably, he would have nothing at all to do but to acquiesce—though even acquiescence seemed a farce, where no appeal for permission had been made !

“At all events,” said he to himself with a deep-drawn sigh, as he drove up to his own door, “it certainly saves one a great deal of trouble.”—And thus he consoled himself!

CHAPTER VII.

ON ascending to his own room, he found he was correct in his conviction. Theresa emerged from her dressing room as he entered, and after coolly asking him if he had spent a pleasant evening, she began explaining all she had done in his absence.

“Mamma and I had a delightful chat together; we talked over all our plans, and as you were not present to help, I took upon myself to send a parcel by the Dorchester coach, enclosing a letter to Lady Rydal; the coach will reach Dorchester at two o’clock, and I said that if we had not made our appearance by five, she was not to expect us till Saturday; that gives her time to invite Mamma too, if she likes.”

Mark winced. This was just what he had dreaded.

"Then does Mrs. Dering propose making any stay in England?" he asked.

"Of course if she is once here, she will not expect to be sent back instantly, when her two only children are both, naturally, too happy to enjoy her society," retorted Theresa, "have you taken any sudden dislike to Mamma, that you seem so anxious to get rid of her? or has any one been setting you against her?"

"Spare me these speeches, Theresa," said Chetwode, "for it is impossible for me to reply to them; I only wish to know, as befits the master of the house, whether Mrs. Dering came to England merely on business, or whether she purposes, without my invitation, becoming my guest?"

"Your guest?" echoed his wife, with a slight laugh, "no; Mamma is going to be *my* guest! I will take all the trouble of her off your hands, and if Lady Rydal does not choose to include her in our invitation, (and being Mrs.

Bellingham's daughter, I suppose she will not!) Mamma can just stay here till we move into Seaton, and then join us."

Yes; it was all arranged for him; Mark was to have no trouble; Mrs. Dering, as well as everything else, was to be taken completely off his hands, and, since it went against his nature to provoke scenes which rent his very soul, he was to resign himself for the future, to being a passive instrument in the hands of those whom he had raised from obscurity to prosperity.

This last most painful idea was one of very recent birth in Mark Chetwode's mind; it was unlike him to indulge it, even for a moment; but the tone, now become habitual to Theresa, had engendered it in the first instance, and as he, day by day, saw her grow more wilful, more careless of his happiness, and more indifferent to his opinion, slowly and gradually there dawned the distressing conviction, that interest, not affection, had prompted her to become his wife, and that in that act, a colder heart and a more

calculating head, had weighed the advantages for her, and stimulated her to compliance!

But the deed was done; there was no use looking back; all Mark Chetwode hoped was, that some day, the errant heart might be reclaimed, and his own affection meet its due reward. He devoutly hoped too, that some happy day might bring light into his sad and childless home, and that that tie, that bond of union, sacred and dear beyond words, to those who bear the blessed name of parents, might at some period of their career, knit them together, and wake in Theresa's breast that tenderness to which it was at present a stranger.

It was often with a grief which he could not control, that Mark reflected on this additional disappointment of his married life; he often said to himself, "Who would appreciate the blessing of a child as I should?" and then the knowledge that the priceless boon was about to cheer and gladden the already happy dwelling of the Keatings, and that to himself, no such prospect was in store, but that day by day, month

by month, and year by year, he might still pine and long in vain for such sunshine in his home—all this depressed him till he hardly knew himself; he hardly knew what to make of the morose feelings and gloomy sadness, with which he looked on the future and lived in the present.

But to return to his guest. The next morning, Mrs. Dering, attired in the prettiest of toilettes, somewhat between a *peignoir*, and a morning dress, sat at breakfast without the least appearance of having made an impromptu journey, or an unforeseen visit.

Two large packing cases of her property had also arrived, at which she expressed herself greatly astonished, but concluded it was only a continuation of the impertinence of those from whom she hired her "small apartments."

Chetwode suggested, on hearing this, that instead of re-engaging them, she should pay the bill, (the just demand, he had nearly said,) and look out for others, but this the widow appeared reluctant to do; she said they were

such delightful apartments that she really did not mind putting up with a little inconvenience, to enjoy their advantages—in short, Chetwode saw, that she had some reason for not changing, and as her whole system was wheel within wheel, intricate beyond his power of unravelling, he let the subject drop, and made up his mind to write the letter she had requested.

The next subject that came on the tapis, was Seaton and its neighbourhood.

Mrs. Dering was very voluble all of a sudden on the advantages of good society; she was of opinion that there was no advantage on earth so great as mixing with ones superiors, and she expatiated at great length on the injury which even a month or two spent in inferior society, inflicted on the manners.

To a certain extent, her son-in-law agreed with her, though he could hardly help smiling to himself at the new sentiments sported by her who, till lately, had had the just reputation of tolerating all sorts of “trumpery” for the sake of “company.”

"As far as Seaton is concerned," said Theresa, in reply to these remarks, "I hope, dear Mamma, you will soon have an opportunity of judging in person; after us," she added, turning to her husband, "Mamma proposes going to Georgy."

"Yes," continued Mrs. Dering, "I had originally intended making my visit there first, so as to be with her at the approaching anxious moment, but then I reflected that as Seaton is only a few miles from the Hall, I might kill two birds, by enjoying my Theresa's society, and being useful to my Georgy at the same time."

Mark was perfectly aware that Mrs. Dering made a point of "killing two birds," as she called it, whenever the opportunity occurred, but at the same time, it struck him as rather strange that she should have preferred his roof to Mr. Keating's, considering the circumstances, and he mildly insinuated as much.

The widow rarely hesitated long for an answer; she was ready for the charge in a mo-

ment, and replied that the mother of Mr. Keating might have considered her presence as officious.

"Hardly," returned Chetwode, "the mother of Georgina would surely have a prior claim, and the daughter would naturally give her own parent the preference."

"At all events," interrupted Theresa, quickly, with a glance at her husband, from which he instinctively turned, "we have gained by Georgy's loss, so we ought only to be too happy; Seaton is no distance from Georgy, therefore Mamma need never regret her choice."

Far from regretting, Mrs. Dering vehemently protested that the arrangement was perfectly voluntary, and delightful to her in every respect.

"Did you know, Theresa," she suddenly began again, "that our old friend Mr. Champneys has been staying with the Keatings lately?"

No; Theresa had not heard of it, and thought

the old couple must have had enough music in that case, to last them their lives.

“ He was an old admirer too of my Georgy’s,” continued Mrs. Dering, addressing Chetwode, “ and I think she has done so wisely in retaining him as a friend ; many young women lose sight of their ancient loves entirely after their marriage.”

“ And very properly,” answered Mark laconically, but rather severely.

“ Do you think so ?” exclaimed the gay widow in a tone of infinite astonishment, “ you surprise me ! now my creed is, that no one can be a truer friend than he whose friendship is based on attachment.”

“ A most dangerous creed, Mrs. Dering !” returned Mark with hasty warmth, for he did not like the light that flashed from Theresa’s eyes as the sentiment was uttered, “ and one—forgive me for saying so—but one which might prove pernicious beyond expression were the mind ill-regulated on either side ; there is a vast difference between the attachment to which

you allude, and that founded on friendship ; where the former has been entertained, the less the young people meet after the marriage of either, the better."

" You are very singular in that opinion, dear Mr. Chetwode," persisted Mrs. Dering, encouraged by the assenting looks and smiles of her daughter, and excuse my adding that I think it a mistaken one ; when my poor girls were left fatherless, the kindest friend I found in my bereavement was an officer in the same regiment as my husband, for whom I had never been able to feel more than esteem."

Mark was provoked almost beyond his patience at the turn of this conversation, and fretted himself into more and more of a fever as each word fell from the lips of his mother-in-law, whilst Theresa was imbibing it all with visible zest, and thus adding torture to her husband's torment.

" There may be cases," he rejoined, " in which your reasoning may hold good—the subject is one, peculiarly distasteful and objection-

able to me though, and I do not wish to argue on it—I merely wish for the sake of her whose young mind is still susceptible of fresh impressions, and on the pure surface of which I should like no questionable doctrine to rest—for *her* sake, Mrs. Dering, I wish to say, that I consider the theory you advocate most dangerous in itself, and most repugnant to the feelings of any husband in the land !”

And Mark left the room more irritated than Theresa had ever seen him.

Yet she was not alarmed ; his anger had no effect on her, for it was neither directed against herself, nor her mother ; she knew very well what unseen power had made him so warm on the subject—that is, she more than suspected that he had been spurred on by the insinuations of Madame D’Esterville, and that he looked upon this as too good an opportunity to be lost ; — thus, she laughed as he left the room, and merrily asked the abashed lady who had sported a creed which she saw was peculiarly

heretical in that house, if she did not think Mark a regular old maid?

Mrs. Dering did not venture quite to agree because she thought she had better play her cards equally, so she said—

“ Oh no, my dearest!—only a little singular; men think so differently on these points, so I would always recommend a wife to conform to the peculiarities of the husband allotted to her, be they what they may.”

“ Nay!” laughed the young daughter, “ I doubt if I could ever so model myself after Mark’s fashion, as to be the prude *he* is!—he, does not mean half he says; he talks himself into a passion, and then he says all sorts of things; besides I know what makes him so touchy just now—I more than suspect some one has told him that I encountered Edward Sydenham the other day, and you remember perhaps, that he was always very jealous of him!”

Mrs. Dering was surprised at this piece of news; she was surprised that Sydenham had

not told her he had seen Theresa, for the day before she left Paris she had met him herself—he was passing through, *en route* for Switzerland, meaning to make a three months' tour.

“And then?” asked Theresa.

“Why then, I suppose, he will come and settle at home.”

In the course of two days, the answer to Theresa's letter, arrived from Lady Rydal, and, as she had anticipated, Mrs. Dering was *not* included in the renewed and cordial invitation for Mark and his wife to come whenever it was most agreeable to them. Consequently, though Theresa did not let the occasion pass without sundry observations which might once have been very annoying to her husband, had he not been, like the eels, accustomed to them, there was nothing now to be done but allow Mrs. Dering to remain in Curzon Street till Seaton was tenantable.

Mrs. Chetwode, when she heard of this, could not help saying that she thought it a very unnecessary piece of kindness on the part of

her son, to incur the expense of another week or fortnight of a very expensive house, besides keeping two or three servants, who would be useful at Seaton, comparatively idle, in Town.

This had never struck Mark; he thought too, that it could not have occurred to Theresa either, since the plan had been at her suggestion; nevertheless, the deed was done; he had complied, because Theresa had requested it, and at his mother's gentle smile and shake of the head, he turned away, for the smile and the action touched a thrilling chord.

"At the same time, mother," he added, in extenuation, "Theresa would have thought it very unkind had I refused."

"Not, perhaps, if you had represented the case in the light you now see it."

"No, I dare say not; but it never struck me—in fact, somehow or other, it was all arranged before I thought much about it; Mrs. Dering's presence worries me—I do not conceal this from you,—and within the last few days, she has given utterance to sentiments

and principles, which make me wonder how my Theresa ever came out of the furnace so pure in heart, and so correct in conduct—for you must own, mother, that her manners are faultless;—however, altogether I felt so harassed, that I caught at the first loop-hole by which I could escape from an intercourse which I consider objectionable.”

“My dear Mark, a little firmness on your part would have obliged Mrs. Dering to have found lodgings; I do not say this from unkindness, but because I see she is making you miserable; you might even have asked me to house her myself.”

“True,” agreed Mark; “but I never thought of it;” and that argument was too unanswerable for any more to be said.

From the home which the presence of the busy interloper had rendered positively distasteful since it was utterly impossible for him ever to find Theresa one instant alone, Chetwode now almost entirely absented himself.

In the morning, immediately after breakfast,

before the incessant ringing of the door bell began, he made his escape, but even then, his egress was frequently arrested by odd-looking people waiting to see Mrs. Dering.

In the evening, when he returned to dinner, the first objects his eyes encountered were notes lying on the hall table—ominous-looking despatches—addressed in curious handwriting, and generally fastened with a wet wafer.

Then, when he ascended to his dressing-room, there was nothing ready for him; Victor had been out since luncheon with Mrs. Dering, and had not returned within half an hour of the dinner hour; the footman, of course, was out with the carriage.

Such was the life to which Mark Chetwode was subjected during the last few days of his sojourn in London, and yet his temper stood it wonderfully, considering, and he would sit down to a book till the absent ones came back, and console himself with the reflection that it could not last much longer, and it could never

happen again; at Seaton it would be all very different.

It had now come to the last day in Town; the packing was all completed, the arrangements all made, and Mrs. Dering was to follow the party down to their new home in a fortnight.

They had all promised to spend that last evening in Hill-street, but when it came to the point, nothing would induce Theresa to keep the engagement, because two stalls had been sent to her for the French Play, and she could not resist the temptation.

Mark tried to dissuade her from her resolution, but he might as well have talked to rocks and stones; she was determined not to lose the last sight of Bouffé, and moreover she was bent upon his accompanying her!

"Mamma and I cannot go alone; who do you suppose would like to go without a *cavalier* if they could help it? at any other moment I might have found one, and so spared you the trouble, but as it is, there is no time, so if you

refuse to go with me I shall be obliged to give it up."

Chetwode was sadly divided; it was always hard for him to refuse Theresa the smallest boon, and knowing how greatly she enjoyed the French plays, he was more than inclined to give way, particularly as on this occasion, she did not according to her usual custom, insist on his compliance; but another thought occurred to him; if he did so, Mrs. Dering would go alone to Hill-street, and the excellent people there, already strongly prejudiced against her, would have to listen to all her prosy dialogues, or else exert themselves to entertain her, during the whole evening long!

This, however, proved eventually the order of the day, and Chetwode, whose imperfect knowledge of the language, made the entertainment to which he was dragged, anything but lively, accompanied his young wife to St. James's Theatre, as a victim is led to the slaughter.

The next morning the whole household were

on the alert early, and then a circumstance occurred which so completely opened the eyes of Mark Chetwode to the character of his mother-in-law, that his whole nature experienced a sudden revulsion, and he looked upon the prospect of their being shortly re-united with positive horror.

It happened that in the course of the few hours which preceded their departure, when, all being done, time hung heavy on their hands, that Theresa all at once recollected that on the first evening of Mrs. Dering's arrival, she had announced that she had something of importance to say to her daughter, but that it had never transpired.

What it was, Theresa now enquired, and Mrs. Dering appeared for a moment to search her memory; then, diving to the depths of the pocket of her dainty little apron, she drew forth a delicate and transparent sheet of paper, ruled with the finest of blue lines.

"So strange, my dearest, that I should actually have it about me at this moment!"

And she unfolded what looked like a very long and carefully written bill.

"A bill?" exclaimed Theresa half frightened, and recollecting her husband's indignation on a former occasion—"Good gracious, mamma...I hope I am not to have anything to do with that?...Mark made me so solemnly promise..."

"My dearest, it certainly is a bill, but not to be paid!—half *is* paid, and the rest I mean to dispute; but just listen to me;—you recollect a large bill Léontine ran you up for dresses in Paris?"

"Certainly—when Mark behaved so well."

"You recollect, perhaps, the items?"

"Not I, Mamma! how should I?—at this distance of time?"

"But, my darling, it is of the utmost importance; in that bill of yours, Léontine, by some of her awkward mistakes, put two dresses of mine—I noticed it at the time, but, most unaccountably, it never occurred to me again

to speak to you about it, though fifty times it has been on my very lips;—I always meant to name it and repay you, and never recollected to do so—however, of that, by and bye—imagine her cool impertinence! her consummate cheating!—thinking, no doubt, that you would, no longer have the original bill in your possession, what does she do, but actually send me in my own poor little account, and add to its humble amount the very two dresses... a black velvet somewhere about sixteen guineas, and a grey *gras des Indes* about seven guineas—the identical two which I remember to have remarked she had in so extraordinary a manner put in *your* bill, and for which you have paid!—now, my dearest, have you that bill?”

“Mark keeps all my papers of that kind,” was Theresa’s reply, as she hastily strove to relieve her mother’s mind of its anxiety—“do not worry yourself, Mamma—it can be set right in a moment.”

“Mr. Chetwode?” repeated the widow,

rather daunted by the announcement—"dear me, this is very awkward—I wish, now, that—"

"What does it signify," cried her daughter laughing, "where is the difference?—he or I?—you may repay *me*, if you like, Mamma, and I shall tell Mark I consider the three and twenty guineas a perquisite!"

"But, my darling, you know it is a large sum for me, and I was going to ask you to let me refund *after* this year, since the last few months have been sadly ruinous to me—"

"Dear Mamma, Mark never thinks of those things—nor I either now; but why do you look so vexed?—what do you wish? You cannot suppose we shall arrest you!—why do you look so strange?"

"I was thinking of Lèontine."

"She is a cheat, that is all; if we find the bill, we will prove her so, and I shall not employ her any more—I shall go to Camille; she is by far the first I am told."

But this assurance did not seem to be what

Mrs. Dering required; the words of her daughter did not appear at all satisfactory, and the conversation was carried on at great length, till both agreed that the bill must be produced, therefore a reference to Chetwode—which Theresa now saw was what her mother disliked—was unavoidable.

Of that there could be no doubt, so the young wife wondered why there was so much hesitation; three and twenty guineas was too large a sum to be risked, because some incomprehensible scruples made the widow shrink from applying to her son-in-law, so Theresa ran down to the dining-room to seek her husband, and there found him, just preparing to lock up his desk.

To explain the case in her own rapid way, took Theresa very few minutes, and it engrossed no more of Chetwode's time to comprehend it perfectly, though not quite according to the view taken by his wife.

His conviction, however, that these expensive dresses were *not* inserted in Theresa's bill

by accident, and his firm belief that had not Léontine been detected in her dishonest proceeding, no notice of the *mistake* would have been taken, were facts that he kept to himself.

Nothing short of a positive want of even the semblance of principle on the part of Mrs. Dering, could disgust him much more with her than he was already disgusted, therefore he forbore uttering even a remark, but took all the necessary trouble of unpacking part of his desk to find the key of a box in which the bill in question was deposited, in solemn silence, and then placed it in Theresa's hands.

Certainly Mrs. Dering always *pretended* to be everything that was just and upright... Mark felt that she was Theresa's mother, and therefore he tried to think that even the assumption of rectitude was a 'saving clause' in her character—but this was now the third or fourth instance of the kind to which he had been subjected since she became his mother-in-law, and he was getting out of patience; he resolved in his own mind that he would bear it no longer, conse-

quently in giving Theresa the bill, in which certainly the two dresses in question were inserted in black and white, he quietly remarked that he would not inconvenience Mrs. Dering by requiring her to refund before the month she had stated, but that *then*—and he raised his eyes with an expression in them that surprised Theresa, and showed her that though, to her, he might be kind, indulgent, yielding and even weak, others might not trifle with him; she had power it was true, but the power rested with her—it went no further, and Theresa re-ascended the stairs, saying to herself,

“Now I call that very shabby of him; he should have presented them as a *cadeau*.”

So seemed to think the out-witted widow, but she concealed her vexation as well as she could, and trusted, that as there were many months between the present time and January, the memory of Mark Chetwode might prove as defective as that of Lèontine.

The horses stood at the door, the boxes and imperials were all deposited in their different

places, when, with a heart full of joy and relief at his emancipation, Mark waited the pleasure of his beautiful young wife.

Attended like a shadow by her mother, Theresa soon appeared, with Victor in the rear; Victor was to remain in Curzon Street to be in attendance on Mrs. Dering, therefore his master, to whom he was valet, was to be dependant on the services of Lord Rydal's servants, until that lady rejoined the circle in which she proposed spending the month of August.

The door was closed—the horses were off—Mark waved his hand, and Theresa cried "*au revoir!*" and now, for a time, there was freedom in the air!

The shadow that had preyed more on his mind than did ever the want of one on that of the Shadowless Man, was now peeled off the surface of Mark Chetwode's existence, and the earth was lighter in consequence. He seemed to breathe in another world, and when, on reaching Ringmere, they entered the spa-

cious hall, and were immediately ushered to their apartments, he could hardly persuade himself that Mrs. Dering's ceaseless tongue would not again ring in his ears at dinner, and that on the contrary, fifty or sixty long miles stretched their welcome length between him and the object of his distrust and dread.

CHAPTER VIII.

THIS was the first time that Theresa had ever stayed in a large country house.

At the Keatings' she was comparatively at home, but here, at Ringmere, though arriving in the character of a relation by marriage, she felt that sort of restraint and isolation, which everyone, similarly situated, would feel for the first few hours.

Mark had so timed the journey that they had only arrived an hour before dinner, consequently, the members of the family had retired to dress, and a strange quiet pervaded the house, till suddenly, through the vaulted hall and long passages, the gong sounded, what appeared to Theresa, an alarm, and her maid entered to tell her that when dinner was on the

table it would be announced by a repetition of the same music.

Like most persons in her capacity, Theresa's elegant French maid had been employing the spare half hour in making herself agreeable, and finding out who was staying in the house, and though she had only succeeded in discovering the name of one married pair, she had satisfied herself on the important fact of how many places were laid round the dinner-table.

There were to be twelve—for the room being lighted up, and the passage to it in darkness, she had taken advantage of the obscurity to peep in, and ascertain the number.

Consequently, Theresa found a pink tarlatan prepared for her adornment—though the name that Athalie had caught, had well nigh made her out of humour with every dress in her wardrobe.

“The D'Estervilles—Annie D'Esterville, of all people in the world, to be staying in the same house with me! of course Lady Rydal

will have asked Georgy to meet us here to-night, and then that odious girl will begin her old course of conduct with Mr. Keating, just to annoy us! Athalie, why have you put out that pink tarlatane, when you know Madame D'Esterville generally wears pink? there may be a new shade since we left Paris, and if so, she will have it."

"Madame," was Athalie's brisk reply, "I have seen the dress Madame D'Esterville intends to wear; her maid was preparing it in the lady's-maid's room; it is white over *paradis*—it will look very *fâde* by your rose tarlatane."

Theresa was satisfied; and when she was dressed, Athalie saw by the look she gave herself in the long glass, that her decision had been wise.

The pink tarlatane looked as if it had never been worn; every fold was in its place, and there was a freshness both about it, and the beautiful figure round which it floated, which made Mark feel proud as she descended the wide staircase on his arm, and elicited from the

ladies-maids' who were in ambush, ranged up a back staircase to scrutinize the guests, an exclamation of perfect satisfaction at the loveliness of the young Mrs. Chetwode of whom so much had been said.

The room was full when they entered, and Lady Rydal's fair form, if possible more extensive than ever, interposed such a volume of brocaded pink satin between Theresa and the guests, that she did not even attempt to look for Georgy till the wondrous draperies had rustled on to welcome Mark.

Then, her hand was taken by Francis Keating, and then by the old Major, but neither that lady in white muslin over *paradis*, nor a magpie lady in a white satin, half covered with black lace, nor that other apparition in an amber silk, with strange tags of pearls hanging from her *chevelure*, and bracelets from her wrist to her elbow, was her simple and graceful sister Georgy, and she asked her brother-in-law, with piteous disappointment, what had

prevented the presence, to which she had so longingly looked forward.

“The arrival of your nephew, and my son!” was the abrupt announcement; and so delightful was the news, that Theresa neither knew nor cared for several minutes that Madame D’Esterville was in the room—that Mrs. Bransby was waiting to be recognised—and that the lady who was scanning her from head to foot with her glass, was Mrs. Tremlett-Tremlettson.

After the first joy of the news of her sister had subsided in Theresa’s breast, there rose another feeling—that of keen regret, that her mother should be absent at such a moment.

This regret was so openly expressed that Mr. Keating felt called upon to reply to it, whilst the old Major stood by in pompous silence, his sly, sharp eye, peering out of one corner, at the brilliant figure before him.

What his son said, he did not hear, but Theresa saw by the expression of the father’s face, that it was owing to him, that there was

no room at the Hall for Mrs. Dering! She knew the old Major so well by this time, that she could see his son had already prejudiced him, and that in marrying Georgina, he certainly had not married her mother too, either to himself or his family.

"Is it not vexatious?" she continued, turning to Lady Rydal; "is it not tantalizing for poor Mamma, that this event should have occurred just a week too soon for her!"

But on Lady Rydal's diplomatic face neither assent nor dissent was visible; on its fair, fat surface, there sat the smile which had dimpled her pretty round cheeks from childhood—that convenient smile which some people have the gift of calling up on all occasions, and which looks polite and pleasant, but says nothing at all.

This first dinner passed off as all first dinners do, where a party of almost strangers are assembled to spend some days together; there was a great deal of exertion on the part of the host and hostess to make the conversation

general, and a tincture of stiffness over the early part of the ceremony which gradually wore off.

Neither Theresa nor Madame D'Esterville however, could boast of any *mauvaise honte*, and Mrs. Bransby was comparatively at home, so the five ladies had plenty to say when they retired to the drawing-room, one after the other, in proper precedence, Mrs. Tremlett-Tremlettson making a little dash at the door lest Madame D'Esterville should by any chance, take the lead.

The latter seized upon Theresa the moment she could, with an appearance of great cordiality, and began saying as many disagreeable things in an agreeable way, as she could possibly think of.

"So you have actually bought a place in the neighbourhood! actually going to settle down in the country! we must begin a correspondence, I think, that I may keep you au fait as to what is worn in the world."

"I shall be afraid to trust to your taste,"

laughed Theresa, scornfully, "for I have been too lately in Paris not to know every new colour and every new fashion too."

"A cut at my poor pale *paradis, ma belle!* but you do not suppose I should waste the sweetness of my last dresses *here!* why, they will be startlingly new in the country three years hence! but tell me—why do you desert Paris and London?"

"We desert neither; we mean to spend our days amongst the three."

"Really!—and have you a house in Town?"

"No—we have not."

"Oh, how can you like going into strange houses! so uncomfortable; perhaps it is an absurdity on my part, but when we used to take a house for the season, I always used to feel almost as disreputable as if I were in lodgings."

"I cannot say I know what it is to feel disreputable," said Theresa, "but do not tell me, for I do not wish to know; where are you living now? in England or Paris?"

"D'Esterville has just bought a *bijou* of a

a house in Belgrave Street, but we shall always winter in Paris as usual, and summer here."

"Then you are come for some time?"

"A month or two, I suppose; but why have you given up the plan of living with Mr. Chetwode's family? how was it you did not get on together? I take such an interest in you, that you see I ask all sorts of questions."

Certainly no question could have been much more disagreeable to Theresa than this; and the expression, "you did not get on together," was even more objectionable than the rest of the sentence, for though it was an opinion which the world would form, without hesitation, its want of truth and want of all foundation, stung Theresa to the quick.

As it happened, she "got on" perfectly well with her husband's relations. She neither liked nor disliked them; she felt them to be too insignificant and harmless for either love or hatred, and no sentiment warmer than indifference animated her with regard to them.

They lived out of the world; they had no

society but intimates, consequently their conversation was limited to very narrow bounds, and their habits and manners were influenced accordingly.

Mrs. Bellingham herself used to laugh to see Mrs. Chetwode and her solitary daughter "prick up their ears" as she called it at any little scrap of news, and was often highly amused at the importance they attached to it, and the time it lasted them in the way of amusement!

The old lady was not herself deficient in the kind of curiosity which "pricks up its ears" to hear something new, but then her range was greater, her world wider, and her mind consequently packed up in a less diminutive compass, than the minds of those must be, who trust to the newspapers and a handful of friends, for all that they know of the world and its goings on.

Thus, taking into consideration the uniform kindness of the inhabitants of Hill Street, and their utter inoffensiveness, the remark of

Madame D'Esterville was peculiarly cutting to Theresa, in fact, there was hardly a word that she had uttered during that short conversation, which had not either piqued or annoyed the beautiful young wife of whom she had always been so jealous.

It was therefore with a great deal of satisfaction that Theresa saw Mrs. Bransby making her way towards herself and her companion, and steering carefully through the tables and chairs so that the stiff double skirt of her white silk dress should deal no destruction around.

"Heaven defend me from this woman," murmured Madame D'Esterville moving away, "we shall have the governess's story all over again."

But Mrs. Bransby was too sincerely glad to get away from Mrs. Tremlett-Tremlettson, who had been talking of nothing but peers and peeresses for the last half hour, to express anything but pleasure at meeting Theresa again, and offering her all sorts of poultry and re-

ceipts, as soon as she should be settled in her new home.

"The farm yard is sadly deficient," she began, "but I can supply you with three of a great many kinds of fowls—three of a kind, and you must remember that the Dorkings are very pugnacious."

Theresa had no more idea than the man in the moon what was meant by "the Dorkings," but she made the requisite acknowledgments, and Mrs. Bransby went on.

"I think, dear Mrs. Chetwode, you told me you had no family? ah, I thought not! well! children are precious anxieties! I have seven, so I may be allowed to judge; but I was going to say, that till your dairy is organized, do allow us to supply you; I am so particular about milk, because of the children: talking of that, reminds me—I dare say you thought it very strange my looking so often at Mr. Bransby at dinner to-day?"

Theresa had never observed anything of the kind.

“Dear me?—did you not?—now I thought all eyes were upon me, but I really felt it a duty; Mr. Bransby has not been very well lately, and last night I prepared him a draught; he did not take it, but that I shall come to by and bye; what I mean is, that he is far from well, and of all things in the world which, even in health, invariably disagree with him, it is sweet-bread!—would you believe it, at dinner, just because the *épergne* was between him and myself, and he thought I could not see him, he took nearly a whole one!—can you fancy anything so foolish! so rash! so childish!—I moved a little on one side, and I saw by his expression that he felt my eyes upon him, but he never looked up, and the consequence was, he ate it.”

“And why should it do him any harm?” was Theresa’s natural question.

“My dear Mrs. Chetwode!—how completely that shows you are no sick nurse! sweet-breads disagree with him, frightfully!—I shall have such a night of it; if he has an indiges-

tion; such nightmare, and he imploring me to wake him;—just sense enough for that;—but I was going to tell you next about the draught I prepared for him...”

“Theresa,” interrupted the melodious and gentle voice of Lady Rydal at that moment, “I had not time before dinner to introduce you to Mrs. Tremlettson; may I do so now? you will find her amusing.”

Theresa thought any change must be for the better, so, rising and advancing to the great lady, she made one of the low and graceful curtsies so seldom seen, and so difficult of performance.

Mrs. Tremlett-Tremlettson had been struck with her singular elegance from the first moment of her entrance, and though she had not as yet, been able to discover who the Derings were, still the name sounded good, and Theresa was one who would grace any room in the world, even were she low-born.

“You have been having a great deal of con-

versation with Mrs. Bransby," said Mrs. Tremlettson; "do you find her agreeable?"

"Hardly," answered Theresa, "but amusing, *faute de mieux*."

"Yes, amusing, but vulgar; decidedly secondary in manners and style, and yet why she should be so I cannot imagine, for she moves in good circles; I met her first at Lord Arthur Astley's, and she is always staying here, and at the Dowager Lady Erin's; she is very well connected too, which surprises me still more; her sister married Lady Ellen Grey's widower."

Theresa smiled at the far-fetched tie to aristocracy.

"Has she been telling you the story of a governess, whom she affirms, fell in love with her husband?" continued Mrs. Tremlettson.

"No—I had that the last time I met her; I have had the story of a sweet-bread to-night."

"Oh, I had that directly after dinner! here are the gentlemen; is that distinguished looking

man a friend of yours, Mrs. Chetwode? who is he?"

Theresa did not know him, but she had been on the watch for an opportunity of asking the same question all dinner time, only the eyes of the individual had been so often fixed upon herself, that she had not been able to satisfy her curiosity. She only knew that he was *nearly* the handsomest man she had ever seen, and she wondered who he was, for he had been the object of Madame D'Esterville's devoted attention, ever since Theresa and her husband had entered the room.

The face was familiar to her, yet she could not recollect where she had seen it, and her heart beat rather quicker with gratified vanity, when she perceived that he was evidently making some enquiries about her to Madame D'Esterville, and that that lady was replying with ill-disguised pique and annoyance.

But now, coffee was going round; people were falling into their places for the evening; he stranger hung over the chair of his adorer,

—Lord Rydal was talking politics with Monsieur D’Esterville and Chetwode—Major Keating settled himself by the side of Mrs. Bransby, intending to devote himself to her anecdote of the sweet-bread, but unfortunately falling asleep before she had got beyond the draught, —and Keating drew a chair to Theresa’s side, and began complimenting her on her improved appearance.

“Whether it is your London gaieties, or the tint of that prettiest of dresses, I cannot say; but you are really quite charming to-night; I suppose you have been dressing against Annie D’Esterville?”

“It looks so like it, does it not?” returned Theresa, contemptuously, and she then began complimenting him on his improved manners.

“When I first heard who was staying here,” said she, “I thought we should have all those scenes over again which used to disgust us so in Paris, but I am glad to see you have given her up.”

"I?" exclaimed Keating, "not a bit of it! I would flirt with her at this very moment, just as much as ever, if she would flirt with me; but I am thrown over, don't you see? she has given me up, and for that cadaverous looking fellow too!"

"A very handsome man, nevertheless! you men are always so jealous of each other."

"Jealous? *I* jealous of such a fellow as that, who looks as if his mother had nursed him eight and twenty years, and then weaned him on milk of roses?"

"A respectable father of a young family, like yourself, is, I suppose, licensed to make these kind of observations; but who is he? where have I seen his face? or is he like some one I have known?"

"You have seen him before," said Keating with a look and tone suddenly changed to gravity, "when you were staying with us, just before you and Georgy were married, he dined at my father's, with several other officers of

the regiment then quartered at Dorchester; his name is Sydney."

Theresa neither started nor moved.....she hardly breathed...an idea had shot through her brain like lightning...an idea, which the similarity of name first woke; a question suddenly arose in her mind, which it now seemed almost miraculous to her that she had never asked herself before;—it was, what had become of that letter, addressed to Sydenham, which he said he had never received?—that letter confided to Victor to deliver with his own hands, and which he declared he had delivered?

Till that question was answered, that dreadful idea set at rest—there could be no peace for her.

Could it be possible that the letter had fallen into the possession of him who had been so attentively scanning her all the evening? would not the similarity of name account for the mistake? and was there not something in his scrutiny, different from the glances of an eye that only gazed from admiration? yes—she was cer-

tain—or almost so; but then again, Victor knew Edward Sydenham so well—if, as he had given her to understand, he had delivered the letter himself, how could the mistake have arisen?

“Can you remember,” said she, at last, in a whisper to her brother-in-law, “can you remember if I was ever introduced to him?”

“Yes—I introduced him myself.”

“Then I shall bow,” and Theresa bent slightly towards the eyes which, whenever those of Madame D’Esterville were not watching, followed her every movement.

Her temper was not one to brook suspense; she was of that feverish, impetuous nature that cannot wait, where an anxious point is to be ascertained.

That bow of recognition was the opening of the siege, the plan of which she had sketched, with breathless rapidity, as her future course.

Before the setting of another sun she was resolved to know the truth; she listened breathlessly for every syllable that fell from

Major Sydney's lips, imagining, with that strange foolishness which sometimes characterizes our thoughts, when the mind has been much wrought upon, that his words would all bear some sort of hidden allusion, that he would seek to convey to her, in language unintelligible to others, the information she was so desirous to gain; that, in short, though apparently deep in flirtation with Madame D'Esterville, he was only waiting his opportunity as eagerly, as she was watching hers.

At last, the utterance of one word, and that one, from the lips of Monsieur D'Esterville, with whom Major Sydney seemed on terms of brotherly intimacy, served to put the finishing stroke to the suspicions of Theresa.

That word, was the stranger's christian name. Monsieur D'Esterville had occasion to address him, and he called him,

“Edouard!”

Edward Sydney—could there now be a doubt?—and yet, though the names might have

been confused, how had the identity been mistaken?

Who could answer this but Victor? and he was miles and miles away, so, for that evening at all events, the doubts must slumber, and the suspicions try and lull themselves to rest.

In country houses, the first signal for a move, and a dispersion, is generally the appearance of a supper-tray.

Where there are old people there will come in wine and biscuits; where there are young men, broiled bones are popular.

Before, however, anything at all appeared, Mrs. Bransby was seen, carrying her husband off to bed.

Lady Rydal, though deep in piquet with Mr. Tremlettson, saw the movement, and warmly interfered to prevent its achievement.

"Mrs. Bransby! Mrs. Bransby! this will never do! what are you about! breaking up at this unreasonable and unseasonable hour! Mr. Tremlettson, is my *tierce* good?"

"Not good," growled her partner, whilst Mrs. Bransby made her excuses for running away so early; her husband was so very far from well—

"And at dinner, you know—that sweetbread, which invariably gives him an indigestion—"

"But some wine, my dear friend—some hot wine and water—it will be here in ten minutes."

"A thousand thanks, but if we remain I know he will only be tempted, and to tell you the truth, I am going to give him a mustard poultice."

"Good Heavens !" ejaculated Madame D'Esterville, "what will she make him eat next?"

They had hardly disappeared when the expected tray arrived; little dainties went round; Mr. Keating took a motto from a plate of bonbons, and as he stood reading it in an absurd and declamatory style to his quondam flirt, Major Sydney brought Theresa some wine.

She wished water added to it, and whilst mixing it to her fancy, he spoke a few words of the beauty of the neighbourhood, but of Ringmere in particular.

“You know the grounds well, I dare say?” he asked, and Theresa answered that she had never been beyond the lawn.

“We are all going on some expedition to see a house in the neighbourhood directly after breakfast—but if you are an early riser—”

“Up with the lark—and sometimes out,” murmured Theresa almost inaudibly, but her words were heard—her eyelids were never raised, and their long lashes swept a changing cheek, yet the tones of her voice were as firm as they were low, and she retired to rest that night full of trembling, and full of expectation.

How eventful to her, had that first evening of her country life been!

CHAPTER IX.

THE next morning rose gloriously ; it rose as a summer's morning should—bright—still, yet with that light, blue, hazy look, which betokens the dawning of a sultry day.

Theresa was up—not with the earliest of the larks—but if a lark had overslept itself, she would have been up with it, for the rest of the guests of the house were not stirring.

She descended the wide stair-case noiselessly, yet wondered what made it echo so much more that morning than it had done the evening previously, and entering the drawing-rooms, all the window of which were thrown wide open ; she sauntered down the steps leading to the lawn, one by one, and gazed around.

How peaceful—how beautiful it all looked. Before her, in a valley, lay stretched the park of Ringmere, with the deer scattered here and there, and already keeping nearer the shade than the sunshine, as if they knew what was coming, and wished to engage places beforehand, wherein to shelter from the heat.

On the right rose a wooded hill; paths, which were soon hidden in the clustering shrubberies, peeped out at intervals, and looked inviting in Theresa's eyes, yet a something prevented her moving a step further just then—a sort of feeling that she should not like to be first at the meeting so singularly, so tacitly appointed.

She next turned her attention to the left; a continuation of the lawn on that side of the house was laid out as a rose garden, and the fanciful beds were glowing with the gorgeous hues of their luxuriant occupants, over which bees were humming, and frolicsome butterflies careering.

Beyond was a conservatory of considerable

extent, and as the faint breathings of the languid air, brought its freight of perfume by, she was tempted, and yielded to the temptation, and keeping within the shadow of the house, approached and entered its thick groves of every kind of rare plant, flower and shrub.

A gardener was watering his charges, and she addressed him about some blossom which had attracted her attention.

As gardeners always do, he gave her a long latin name, and she thanked him, though she had gained no information, as far as her question was concerned; but the sound of her voice had an effect in another part of the building, for immediately afterwards, steps approached, and Major Sydney appeared before her.

The gardener, with praiseworthy tact, withdrew, and Theresa felt like a culprit.

The guilty always seize on trifles, and she knew her cheeks were burning at the idea that the man had retreated because a lady and gentleman had met amongst the groves of trees and flowers—alone.

Otherwise, she was calm ; to all appearance she was entering upon an interview, in which even her companion seemed embarrassed and hesitating, with the most unmoved composure.

One circumstance only, showed that this was no common meeting, no casual rencontre between guests of the same house, and that was, the customary greeting of those who meet for the first time in the day, was unobserved between them ; each felt that a fact of importance had to be communicated by one, in answer to a question from the other, and each knew, not a moment was to be lost.

It was fortunate for Theresa that a sort of desperate resolution to know the truth had nerved her ; otherwise Major Sydney, confused nervous, and oppressed with the awkwardness of his position, would never have mustered courage to stammer out his story as well as he did.

Theresa spoke first, and her words were low, hurried, but energetic.

“ We have met, Major Sydney, by a tacit

agreement—it shows that we know—that you must guess, rather—that I seek an explanation which I cannot help thinking you can give,—if I am right, I need say no more than this—you must understand by even these few words, what I mean.”

“Perfectly,—the very object of my visit here, was solely to meet you, for I was staying with the D’Estervilles, and only came as their friend;—a year has elapsed, Mrs. Chetwode, since”—

“I know—I know—it is just a year!—but that letter?”

“I have it!—from the hour it was placed in my hands, it has never left me, night or day!”

“You read it?” asked Theresa, almost in a whisper, and her breath coming short and quick—

“I did,” was the reply, whilst the blood mounted to the forehead of Major Sydney—“but it was not till I had read it through, that something struck me, it could not be for me!—Mrs. Chetwode—it is true I thus possessed

myself of the secret of my friend, but—in justice to myself, I must also tell you, that I also, at that moment, by a strange coincidence, was expecting—what might have been—a similar letter.”

In the midst of the most trying, the most engrossing, and the most absorbing scenes, is it not strange, how very often the merest trifle will arrest our attention, and completely divert it for minutes together!

As these words were uttered—words, every one of which Theresa was drinking in with such earnest interest that the conservatory might have been filling with people, and she would neither have seen nor heard them—it afterwards struck her as singular, that she was much more impressed with the deep and vivid blush that actually dyed her companion's face, than with the substance of his communication.

The abstraction, however, was but momentary.

“Go on,” she said, “tell me—quickly—you

have that letter now, you say?—tell me—how did it happen that—that it was never given?”

“From that day, — from the day before that, I mean,” resumed Major Sydney, “I have never met him for whom it was intended; my own dangerous illness stood in the way, subsequently, of my rectifying the mistake, and then, we all lost sight of him, for I like himself, soon after sold out.”

“One more word,” said Theresa hastily, “and I have done; how did it fall into your hands?—who placed it in them?”

“My own servant;—originally, it was given by a foreigner, who had been waiting about for two hours, to the servant who was laying the table in the mess-room, to which this foreigner had in his impatience, penetrated—”

“And then?”

“The man, not reading well, and the foreigner’s pronunciation being confusing, the letter was delivered to my own servant, who transmitted it to me, without even examining

the address, for he knew I had been expecting a letter all day—”

“And you never looked at the address?”

“Look here!” exclaimed Mrjor Sydney, drawing the worn and crumpled sheet from its hiding-place with nervous rapidity—“look yourself—look at the ‘Captain Edward Sydenham,’ and the address immediately beneath—so immediately that the word “Barracks” has run quite into the last syllable of Sydenham—can you wonder that, circumstanced as I have explained to you, I mistook the name for mine!—can you wonder that, on scanning the first few lines, and coming to my own christian name, I continued to think it was still my own letter?”

“Forgive me for interrupting you,” exclaimed Theresa, almost seizing it out of his hand, and thrusting it into her dress—“forgive me, but we have not another moment—I thank you, deeply—sincerely!—I will not insult you by saying a word about *honour*, for he was your

friend—I only thank you—since this letter was written, *we have met!*—consequently, let it, and the circumstances, and this interview, be forgotten for ever from this moment!—there are strange hours in one's life in the world, and this has been one, but now it is all over—we had better each return to the house by the way we each came—some one is already standing at the breakfast room window.”

It was for the mind of a woman to suggest this precaution; that of a man, would not, at such a moment, have compassed it. Major Sydney would, in all innocence, have followed those light footsteps, and, still moving as though in a state of somnambulism, have most probably entered amongst the assembled guests by the side of his beautiful companion, perfectly unconscious, so lost did he seem, that any eye could look reproof, or any heart in secret sneer, at the early morning stroll of comparative strangers.

But in the breakfast room, yawning over the Morning Post, and appearing already worn out

with the fatigues of the day, Madame D'Esterville reclined in an easy chair, sometimes uttering faint ejaculations over the news, and sometimes listlessly watching Lady Rydal in her indefatigable avocations behind a huge silver tea-kettle.

"Upon my word!" was the exclamation of the former as Theresa entered by the window, "you *are* early! where have you been?"

"Not far," said Theresa, carelessly. "I looked into the conservatory and stole some heliotrope, and if you like to go there too, you will find your friend Major Sydney, talking latin with the gardener."

"Really?" replied Madame d'Esterville, trying to speak with unconcern, but evidently startled, "*he* is there, is he?—I suppose he gave you that sprig?—I hope not, for remember he is *my* property—no poaching, *ma belle*!"

One by one, the seats round the table were filled; one by one the guests dropped in, and dropped into them, and then bowed to each other, and asked if it had not been a hot night,

which everybody answered with the same word, and then the work of demolition began, and the trim breakfast array looked, in an instant, a mass of confusion, till, last of all, in walked Major Sydney.

By his side was Mr. Bransby, and they seated themselves in the vacant chairs by Madame D'Esterville.

She turned to the invalid, however, and took no notice at all of her *protégé*; it seemed as if she wished him to see he was in disgrace, for her coquettish airs of indignation were amusing to Theresa, whilst the object against whom they were directed, seemed unconscious in what he had offended, or even that he had offended at all; he seemed lost in thought, and Madame D'Esterville imagined he was piqued!

The plans of the day were now talked over; the whole party appeared bent on having a pic-nic to Holm-Park, the beautiful little property of Mr. Pierrepont, at which, when the Chetwodes were house-hunting, they had once looked, and which was now let to a party o

sportsmen, who were not going to take possession till the shooting-season.

Lady Rydal and Madame D'Esterville were going on ponies; Mrs. Tremlettson offered seats in her carriage to Mrs. Bransby and Theresa, but the latter declined joining the expedition at all, and her excuses rather damped the excitement of the moment, for the Rydals were people who were always making pic-nic parties, and could not bear any expedition to look deficient in the number of those who undertook it.

The loss of Theresa was serious, because more than one of the party had shrewdly suspicious that her defalcation involved the absence of her husband as well, and this proved true enough.

Theresa had fixed her heart on going to see Georgy and the baby; the wish and the anxiety were natural enough, but Lady Rydal assured her that Mrs. Keating would not permit the invalid to see even her own sister; as for the baby, it would be sure to be asleep, so they

might just as well come round by the Hall in their way home, and would not that do as well?

How little they knew Theresa! how little they guessed, that whilst her gentle smiles seemed as though she would eventually yield to the entreating words of her hostess and looks of her husband, in her heart there was no change of purpose, but the fixed resolution, to have her own way, gain her own point, and carry off her husband in spite of all opposition.

Mark, meanwhile, sat waiting to see what would be decided; he hardly took his eyes from Theresa's face, until at last Lord Rydal said—

“Then if you really will desert us Mrs. Chetwode, suppose I ask Mrs. Tremlettson to be so kind as to drop you at the Hall, and then Chetwode can come with us.”

“I am very sorry,” said Mrs. Tremlettson, “but you know I do not visit Mrs. Keating; there would be considerable awkwardness I think——”

"Not just to stop at the lodge-gate?" persisted Lord Rydal.

"Why—not having the honour of Mrs. Keating's acquaintance——"

"It would certainly be excessively awkward!" interrupted Theresa laughing, "Mrs. Tremlettson must not be drawn into so painful a position!—the horses would not stop, depend upon it! they would be too well-bred!—no, Mark and I will go alone if you please, and a pony, or a donkey—or anything you have will do for us."

And as it was evident that Theresa's will was a law, the point was conceded, and the group dispersed till the appointed hour for starting.

"Tiresome, is it not?" whispered Lady Rydal to her husband, "provoking, because I know that good, excellent Mark, would have enjoyed it; he looked dying to go!"

Lord Rydal shook his head.

"If he felt that, he should not have given way; there was no necessity, for he will find

neither Keating nor the Major at home such a day as this, and a baby of two days old will be no great object of interest to him; Chetwode is good and excellent too, but I have heard before this, of rather a tendency to be under petticoat-government."

If anything could have reconciled Lady Rydal to the disappointment, it was, that she could now fill the places left vacant by Chetwode and his wife, with two of her children, thereby infinitely adding to her own prospect of enjoyment, and seriously endangering that of Mrs. Tremlettson, who, like most people who have no children of their own, admired them very much for a little while, but thought them very tiresome as companions for a whole day, for she never knew what to say to them.

The *very* small talk into which a mother falls as a matter of course, with every child that comes in her way, was a language Mrs. Tremlettson and Madame D'Esterville had never learnt, so before they had been half-an-hour in their society they whispered to each other.

“ What a dreadful bore these children are.”

And as the motley cavalcade wound its way through woods and lanes, to the grassy glades of Holm Park, Theresa and her husband in a little pony carriage were jolting along the by-roads on their way to the Hall.

They had been about an hour *en route*, and had accomplished about three miles—wondrous speed for the enormously fat and shaggy pony which laboured along so industriously—but neither of them seemed paying any attention to the rate at which they were going; both were engrossed with their own thoughts, and wrapped up in each other’s conversation.

Theresa looked the picture of earnest animation, whilst on the countenance of Mark, there sat the shadow of annoyance, disquiet, and perplexing thought, deepening at each word of his energetic companion.

Theresa was playing an old game; one which she often played, though each time the cards might be different.

The argument between the husband and

wife was at that moment at its height; Theresa had broached a startling proposition, and Chetwode, almost shuddering, sat silent and attentive, yet gazing before him, as in a dream.

“It is for *you* to speak,” Theresa was saying, “not for me; they are your relations, not mine, and they are good-natured people so why you should hesitate, passes my comprehension;—if you have any feelings of natural tenderness in your heart put yourself in mamma’s place at this crisis; her first grandchild just ushered into existence and she not here to see it!—her own child, on a sick bed with only strangers round her, and her own mother not here to nurse her!—Mark, if the case were mine, would you not send a thousand miles to soothe the heart of a parent under such trying circumstances?—would you not have made up a bed on two chairs even, rather than not house one, who would be deficient in even the common feelings of the lowest orders of

creation, were she not pining and longing to be with her child at such a time?"

"My dearest! I feel every word you say—I see the truth of it all; but what on earth can I do?—how can I possibly ask Keating to send for Mrs. Dering, when he affirmed to me last night that they had no room for her in the house!"

"There *is* room!—but that does not signify—there *is* room, but the Keatings have suddenly turned against Mamma; they courted us till Georgy was won, and then they turned;—however it is not of them I spoke; it is to the Rydals that I look; state the case to them, and see if they do not take the hint; if they do not, then ask at once; Mamma will not care where they put her—only let her be here!"

"I had rather ask at once, than hint," began Mark.

"No," said Theresa, authoritatively; "better get a voluntary invitation than extort one; try the easiest way first, and if that fails, try the other."

"But suppose they should so word the invitation as to make me feel it most humiliating to accept it? people sometimes do, when they are obliged to ask an unwelcome guest."

"Mamma will not care, and the Rydals are not the sort of people; now, Mark, have you promised? will you try? will you see about it this very evening? will you ask it as a personal favour to yourself?"

Chetwode's brow was actually black as night; his very spirit revolted against the commission he was required to perform.

"If you would but do it yourself, Theresa!"

"I?—impossible! my relationship being only by marriage, I am not justified."

"Believe me, they look upon you as just as much their first-cousin as myself."

"Possibly, but I do not feel so, therefore I trust to you; as yet, you have been kind and indulgent to me; do not begin to change the moment you get me all alone amongst your relations."

The cruel injustice of this observation, cut Chetwode to the heart, but he tried to swallow down the choking sensation in his throat, and only dwelt on the word, "you have been kind and indulgent to me."

He well knew he had been kind and indulgent—sometimes he thought, too much so; and had he ever met his reward? alas; but never mind—he had not been so for the sake of reward, but because she was dear,—oh, how dear he hardly dared to think!

And then came another dreadful thought.

Was this persecution never to end? was there not even to be the interval of one week of rest? was the shadow to follow, the influence to be resumed, and the incubus to pounce down again upon his peace, and there be no cessation, and no redress? no wings to fly from it? no mountain to hide from it?

This feeling was now beginning to increase in magnitude and strength to a fearful extent, as all feelings do, on which, with morbid bit-

terness, we feed too long, and Chetwode was wretched.

As Lord Rydal had predicted, Major Keating and his son were both out; they had gone over to Seaton, expecting to find the Chetwode party there, so, whilst Theresa was admiring her nephew, and arguing with the grandmother about the propriety of seeing her sister, Mark was left a prey to his own thoughts, and they were not enviable.

They then returned to Ringmere, and that evening the circle was augmented by the arrival of the Dean of H * * and Mrs. Varley, Lady Rydal's sister; thus, all seemed to favor the *tête-à-tête* in which Chetwode, with heavy heart, and reluctant lips, was to open the distasteful theme of Mrs. Dering's invitation.

In the course of the evening, Theresa—whose watchful eye was now as often fixed on him as ever that of Mrs. Bransby could be, upon her refractory spouse—saw him seize an opportunity when Mrs. Varley was taking the task of doing the honors off her sister's hands,

to seat himself by his cousin on the sofa, and by that time she left the case in his hands, and engaged herself in conversation with Madame D'Esterville and Mrs. Tremlettson — Mrs. Bransby having fastened upon the Dean's lady, with a new story.

Mrs. Tremlettson was enquiring all about Major Sydney; she thought she knew something about him, and Madame D'Esterville, who, having had him to herself all day, had regained her good humour, was satisfying her on all points.

"He looks so well in a room," said Mrs. Tremlettson, "I should like to secure him for my Christmas party, and I rather think he is very well-connected; if he is of the family I mean, he has some very good relations; his mother's first cousin is Viscountess Betchworth, and I am almost sure a Sydney once married into the Belgrave family."

"I am sure I do not know," was the reply, "but I know he is very agreeable and I call

him my *héros de roman*, for his history is quite touching."

Theresa asked directly what it was, for the conversation in the conservatory suddenly recurred to her, and she thought there must be some story attached to his life.

"Why, this time last year he was going to be married; his father made a will by which he was neither to be of age nor to marry until he was eight-and-twenty; this was, to prevent his marrying some cousin, people suppose, but, however, the attachment went on, and the day he was eight-and-twenty, he proposed—fully thinking, and naturally expecting he should be accepted—what do you think! the young lady, who had been faithful for six years, proved false at the eleventh hour, and after engaging herself to him for the space of three months, jilted him for a title!"

How every word of this, recalled the speaking countenance of the injured and betrayed man to Theresa's mind; how keenly she felt that the letter, which at first he must have

thought was for himself, must have inflicted on him the acute pang which another had been spared, and which *he* was destined to suffer twice over, as it were.

Very different were Mrs. Tremlettson's musings; she was playing with her rings during the recital of the story, and at the pause, she said,

"It may be invidious to remark on such a case, but I confess I must say—had I had a daughter—I hardly know whether I could have blamed her;—was the title a peerage?"

"No—a baronetcy only."

"Ah;—that makes a difference—"

"But I was going to tell you—when he first received the news, they say he fell, as if shot, and for four months he has been at the point of death; he then went abroad with a physician, and now—I think he is getting over it."

CHAPTER X.

If ever fair female were in a state of utmost perplexity, consternation, and annoyance, it was Blanche, Lady Rydal, when her cousin stammered out in rapid phrases and incoherent sentences, the object of his engrossing her attention from her company.

She was the kindest, most hospitable and most goodnatured being in the world, and she would have made any arrangement on earth, to which her house was capable, (provided it did not infringe on her nurseries) to accommodate a guest or do a kindness, but in the present case she had actually no room in the first place; and in the next, of all people, to have Mrs. Dering, when there was a prospect of Mrs. Bellingham coming to Ringmere to meet the

Varleys, was almost more than her courage and fortitude could stand.

Lady Rydal liked her cousin Mark; she had a great respect and a great esteem for him, and the few hours she had spent in his society had added another feeling to these, and that was, pity, for she did not think he was appreciated.

Thus, she would have sacrificed a great deal to be able to oblige him (or his wife, for she soon saw through that); but she did not know how it could possibly be arranged. She had not a room vacant, except one, and a dressing-room, left open for her mother and Mary Vere. She had five married couples and a bachelor staying in the house, and she urged that, as a plea which she hoped would have been unanswerable, without positively saying she could not invite Mrs. Dering.

Mark, however, was well-tutored, and he did not take that plea as an excuse; he added, though with reluctant hesitation, that Mrs. Dering was one who did not care where she was put, and Lady Rydal wondered to herself

whether he really liked her himself and liked her society, or whether all this were the effects of "petticoat government."

"At all events," said she, as she rose to break up the conference, "I will speak to Lord Rydal, and you shall know what we can do; you shall know before post-time to-morrow, so do not give it up as a hopeless case till then."

Theresa was satisfied with the success of her husband's exertions; she saw that he had effected what she could not have done so well herself, because she could never have put on the manner which, to him, was as natural as it was unconsciously persuasive.

"I have done your bidding, my dearest," said he, as soon as they were alone, "and as you know how disagreeable my errand was, I hope you will let me ask you in return, a very slight favour."

As it never entered into Theresa's head what his request would be, she promised readily even before asking what it was; great, therefore was her astonishment when he gently

entreated her not to be seen again, alone, and in earnest conversation, with Major Sydney, before breakfast in the conservatory!

“Not for an instant, my dearest,” he said, “do I, myself, censure your conduct, for to me it appears always irreproachable; but these trivial things are seized upon by the ill-natured, and tortured and twisted into distorted shapes, till they assume a form calculated to do great injury.”

Theresa was very angry;—she felt that if he asked her the subject of the “earnest conversation,” it would be impossible for her to tell it, so she resolved to brave it out by being excessively indignant, and vehemently insisting on his giving up his authority.

“Of course I will!” he exclaimed with some surprise, “you do not think me capable of the meanness of striking you in the dark!—no—you shall know of whom it is necessary for you to be afraid, and against whose spiteful remarks you should learn to guard; my informant was Madame D’Esterville.”

"I thought so! I was sure of it!—and you were really so innocent, my dear good Mark, as not to see, that she never would have told you of my having accidentally found myself alone for five minutes in the conservatory with Major Sydney—whilst a gardener, who can perhaps repeat all we had time to say to each other, was watering his plants—unless the companion of my error, had been a great flame of her own! is it possible, you could not see, even at breakfast, that she was furious at his having encountered me, just because he happened last night to ask who I was, and she fancied I had attracted him from herself!"

"But, my dear Theresa, you have met him before—at least, so I understood," said Mark, anxiously.

"I know I have; a year ago he dined at Major Keating's, but he did not make any impression on me, and I did not remember him again."

Chetwode was lost in thought; there was much that relieved him in this explanation, and

much that annoyed him too. He was relieved at thinking that the meeting was *purely accidental*; but he wished Theresa had said a little more, and told him what he already knew from Madame D'Esterville, and that was, that Major Sydney was a brother-officer of Sydenham's.

There were no bounds to the extent of Madame D'Esterville's mischief making, for she neither cared what she said, nor how much of her lively scandal was repeated; indeed she generally only said what she wished should come round again, and she saw Chetwode's character so plainly, his truthfulness, his guilelessness, but at the same time his weak dread of discussions which might lead to dissension, that she made quite a toy of him, and enjoyed nothing more than the double pleasure of vexing him, and giving her ancient rival a sly lash into the bargain.

She had completely succeeded long before this, (with the aid of others, who, however, did not mean to do harm, but good,) in making

Mark Chetwode feel uncomfortable at the mention of Sydenham's name, and when he saw that Theresa also avoided breathing it, he was still more uneasy, for it made him feel a certainty still more painful than an uncertainty, that in the life of his idol and his treasure, there had been some passages which she had not imparted to him, and which now, she never would.

This was dangerous ground for a husband and wife to stand on; that there should be a silent name, and a silent subject between them was a wretched idea for the open-hearted Chetwode, and he could but hope and pray, incessantly, that some day the barrier might be removed,—perfect confidence established,—and perfect affection subsist between them.

“ I wonder,” thought Theresa to herself, “ if Georgy has annoyances of this kind? I wonder if people watch and worry her? if they whisper and invent, and tell tales, and make mischief about her, as much as they do about me? I will ask her the first time I see her; but,”

she continued aloud, "tell me, Mark—did you really never observe the flirtation between this horrid girl and Major Sydney?"

"I have observed that her manners are most objectionable," said Mark.

"I do not mean her manners—I mean, did you not see from the first moment that he was a flame of hers?"

"My dearest Theresa!" exclaimed her husband, warmly, "for Heaven's sake, forbear to couple the name of a married woman with such a word as that."

"Why? why not? where is the harm?"

"The harm, Theresa? the harm of a married woman flirting?"

"Yes—or having an admirer?"

"Are you joking, my dearest?"

"No indeed! not I! do you see any harm in a little innocent flirtation?"

"I hope you are laughing," said Mark turning away, "you must know me too well to be in earnest."

"But I *am* in earnest; I can see the harm

of a girl being a flirt—it makes her either talked of, or laughed at, and people call it angling for a husband, but a married woman, Mark!—why, that is half the advantage of being married; we are free!”

Chetwode looked keenly at his wife, and seeing no sort of smile on her face, he spoke: “Your countenance is a good dissembler, Theresa,—I can see no vestige of the joke in which *I know* you are indulging; however, joke or no joke, those are sentiments which I should never for an instant tolerate; were I D’Ester-ville, my course would be serious, simple, but irrevocable—I could not live with that woman—as far as you are concerned though, my Theresa, my mind is tranquil, for I have never seen you flirt.”

“*Faute d’occasion*,” murmured the beauty; and her husband, hearing only a faint echo of a foreign tongue, took no notice, but let it pass.

Meanwhile, Lord and Lady Rydal had had a long and earnest discussion, as to what they

could possibly do with regard to Mrs. Dering.

They neither of them liked the idea of having her in the house at all, for Mrs. Tremlettson and Mrs. Varley were both very particular people, and lived much in the world, and Mrs. Dering and her two daughters had made no slight sensation in all circles and all societies, so that it was awkward, to say the least of it.

But then—it was for Mark!—that good excellent Mark!—and they finally resolved that it was better to manage it at once, and do it with a good grace, than hesitate and thus lose all credit of the invitation.

At the park-gate was a lodge, and in this lodge, during the shooting season, Lord Rydal often made a bachelor's room. It was therefore arranged that Major Sydney should be asked to be so very kind as to move into that little domicile, and give up his room at Ringmere for a few nights to the mother of Mrs. Mark Chetwode.

And so it was ; and the next morning in re-

ply to Mrs. Dering's despairing letter of regrets, a kind invitation was written by Lady Rydal, begging her to leave Town with as little delay as possible, and that she would find a room prepared for her which] they wished they had been able to offer her sooner !

" Now !" exclaimed Theresa to her husband triumphantly, " do you mean to say I did not advise you well ? are you not pleased at your success ? "

" I am rejoiced if you are happy," was his answer, and he could have added, " only it does not soften my feelings of humiliation at having had to make the request," only this he did *not* add ; he did not like ; he thought it might cause some unpleasantness, and so—he was silent.

And the day after this, in a space of time perfectly miraculous, Mrs. Dering actually made her appearance in the midst of those amongst whom, strange to say, with the single exception of her daughter, there lurked one

universal feeling of repugnance, contempt, or dislike!

Yet, how she talked—how she smiled—how she dressed—and all failed. Mrs. Bransby was the only one who tolerated her, and that was chiefly owing to the fact of the gay widow never having heard any of her stories, and consequently being ready to listen to them all, without the symptoms of impatience manifested by those to whom they were much more than “*twice-told tales*.”

Mrs. Varley was very unlike her sister, Lady Rydal; she was blunt, and slightly coarse in her manners and conversation, despite the most delicate and feminine exterior; she at once pronounced Mrs. Dering the most plausible humbug she had ever met, and said she required “*setting down*.”

“As to the beauty of Mark’s wife,” she added, “there cannot be two opinions; but the man does not know how to manage her; he has married both mother and daughter, for want of proper spirit at the onset. Do you

not see, Blanche, that poor Mark is hen-pecked?"

Lady Rydal assented, more by a shake of the head than by words.

"If I could get him alone, I would tell him so," continued Mrs. Varley; "but Theresa never moves out of hearing."

And this was true; for, seeing the determined, and almost masculine spirit possessed by the wife of the mild and benevolent old Dean, Theresa became doubtful of the amount of cousinly power which she might have over Mark—and Mark *was* weak. To give him his due—to grant that he was good, amiable, and excellent—still, he was weak, and beyond doubt easily influenced. He was peculiarly susceptible of feminine influence above all, and where the arguments of his best friend might have been exerted to the utmost, and yet have failed to convince, a look from Theresa, a word from his mother, and a course of annoying importunities from Mrs. Dering would have made him give way at once; and none knew

this better than did his wife, therefore she dreaded Mrs. Varley.

The influence of her mother, she could direct and model after her own will—that of Mrs. Chetwode she had already considerably weakened—her own she knew was on the increase, daily and hourly, and thus, her mind was resolved that no new one should be added to the list. In time, she intended, in her power and might, to stand perfectly alone.

The days of the visit to Ringmere were now drawing to a close. Mrs. Dering had interfered sufficiently with Mr. Keating, his establishment, his wife, and the monthly nurse, to have driven the whole family nearly distracted, when the last upholsterer left Seaton, and the last luxurious chair was placed in its proper position in the drawing-room—a signal for the Chetwodes to sound the note of departure, and prepare to enter their own home, Mrs. Dering having volunteered to sleep there by herself the night before her son-in-law and daughter took possession; ostensibly

to satisfy herself that nothing felt or smelt damp, but in reality to have the pleasure of ordering about the whole household, and impressing them all with a sense of her dignity and position in that mansion.

Mrs. Varley laughed openly at this intention, and quizzed the widow unmercifully.

"Now tell me honestly, Mrs. Dering—how many rooms do you think you can occupy, and how many beds do you think you can sleep in, in the course of this one night?—let us suppose you spend an hour in each—that is airing eight, at a moderate computation!—I wish I had such a mother, Theresa!—quite a *patent invention*!"

"But talking of our mother," interrupted Lady Rydal, seeing both Mrs. Dering and her daughter look nettled, "I heard from her to-day, and she comes down the day after to-morrow."

"What a sudden notice!" exclaimed everybody.

"She is obliged, she says," laughed Lady

Rydal, "for Mary Vere has lost her heart!—my mother had occasion to see her lawyer on business the other day, and he, being ill, sent a deputy; the deputy was young, good looking, and susceptible, and Mary Vere has not only inspired him with the tender sentiment, but fallen in love with him herself!--and so, she is to be removed immediately!"

"A pleasant guest!—a love-sick girl!" said Mrs. Varley, "the best plan would be, to keep Major Sydney here, and try and put the lawyer's clerk out of her head; if I were a damsel of her years, or if my good old Dean were gathered to his fathers, that would be just the man I should choose for my second."

Everybody laughed except Madame D'Esterville, and she merely glanced out of the corners of her almond-shaped eyes, and smiled with ineffable contempt.

"Madame D'Esterville looks as if she would like to enter the lists too," said Theresa, quietly.

"Not I," was the pointed reply—"I should

have too many to contend against!" and she thought that amazingly sharp.

It was an August day—still, sultry, and most oppressive—when Theresa and her husband left the hospitable roof of Ringmere, and wended their way to their own home.

Everything looked lovely round Seaton; from the dry and dusty roads, they entered upon the close, thick avenue leading up to the house, where the welcome shade of the chesnut trees, heavy with foliage, was quite a refreshing rest, after the earlier part of the pilgrimage.

Theresa was on the pony which had become so great a favourite with her, during her sojourn at the Rydal's, that they had insisted on her taking it with her to Seaton on a visit. By her side walked the faithful Mark.

At the open window of the drawing-room stood Mrs. Dering, ready to welcome them, and Victor was close by, arranging flowers in the ground glass water-lilies on the table.

Theresa sprang off the pony, and darted into

the drawing-room ; no luxury had been omitted, and every corner was turned to some account.

In one there was a tempting, lounging seat ; in another, an airy pyramid for books or flowers ; a third was a sort of alcove of draperies, from whence the eye, wandering beyond the lawn, could gaze out upon the sunny country and gaze untired, so great was the variety of the scenery.

She next flew up to her bed-room ; like a child, her pleasure and delight found vent in constant movement, and she could not sit still an instant, till, on entering the pretty octagon room appropriated solely to herself for her own boudoir, she dropped into a chair as soft as a nest, which was drawn into an ambush of white and pink muslin draperies by the window, and clasped her hands in speechless ecstasy at the prospect.

This room was just sufficiently elevated for her to have a wide view of the whole country ; beneath her, lay the lawn, just beginning to be

burnt by the summer sun; immediately beyond was the belt of trees which skirted that side of the estate; beyond them were meadows—then the river, curling and winding like a silver snake—hidden here by some projecting bank or knot of drooping trees—then emerging from the shade into the meadows again; at a sudden turn of it, there was a pretty old bridge over which the high road went, and from that point the river disappeared, whilst the road continued rising and rising, a high red bank on one side and a sloping line of marshes on the other, till it also disappeared, losing itself in the distance, and giving place to the blue lines of downs, each line more dim and more misty, till the last faded into the horizon.

“Theresa is struck dumb,” said Mrs. Dering smiling, as she turned to Chetwode, who was delightedly watching the ecstasies of enjoyment which her silence expressed—“she actually cannot speak!”

“What a home!” was Theresa’s reply to

this observation. "I really have no words ! what a glorious prospect ! you will never get me away from this window, Mark, for not even in my dreams did I ever imagine Seaton was so lovely as this !"

Mark was happy ; he would have seized the hand of his wife and devoured it with kisses, but a something withheld him ; the presence of Mrs. Dering was a painful restraint, and instead, therefore, of expressing his perfect delight that his Theresa was so pleased, he only felt the leaden weight of a third presence at an unwelcome moment, and, turning abruptly round, he left the room ; he was full of annoyance and resentment against her, for having neither the tact nor the good taste to see, that following the young couple from room to room, and acting as their indefatigable shadow, was a check, and a torment ; and it was a complete lock and key too upon the lips of the shy and silent Chetwode, who, having extorted from Theresa a promise that she would not go into

her own boudoir until he had arranged it, as he thought, to her taste, was naturally all anxiety to ask her—his heart upon his lips—if he had succeeded to her satisfaction!

This question he could not put in cold and measured tones; yet, before Mrs. Dering, he shrank from any warm phrases; in the perplexity, therefore, of his mind, he took the easiest course, and without a look, and without a syllable, he left the room.

"How strange dear Mr. Chetwode is, my darling," was the widow's exclamation, "one would think he had no soul for the beautiful; no warm feelings at all."

"Oh, I dare say he likes it all very well," answered Theresa, "but he is so cold—so unimpassioned—he does not understand what I feel, I dare say."

And thus was Mark Chetwode appreciated.

For the first week or ten days Theresa was fully occupied, arranging her house and exploring its environs; the novelty of her position amused her, and she took some interest in

the arrangement of a conservatory, so that time did not hang heavy.

The garden too, was beautiful, though much had still to be done in it, and the farm-yard, in its fresh, clean, newness, was an object of curiosity if not of pleasure.

From these immediate precincts, little iron gates led into the surrounding woods, and these, ultimately leading to her favorite walk by the river, were Theresa's chief resort if she could steal away alone; if not, she rarely entered them; but one day she received a check here, which roused her indignation, and made her devise plans not to be again similarly annoyed.

She was quietly strolling along one of these paths, and enjoying the solitude of the scented woods, when a small wooden gate attracted her attention, and she wondered she had never observed it before.

It opened on a rustic bridge, and crossing that, the walk grew broader, and the wood on each side thicker, and across the path, now

rugged and grass-grown, the light streaks of sunshine showed how difficult it was for the rays to penetrate so tangled a copse.

The wilder the better, thought Theresa, and she wandered on, wondering where it would all lead, when suddenly a man stepped out of a side path, and touching his hat, said,

"Beg your pardon, Ma'am; but you can't walk here."

"What do you mean?" asked Theresa with ready warmth, "do you know who you are speaking to?"

"No, Ma'am—but my orders is, nobody is to walk here, because of the birds."

"I shall certainly walk here until I know if any one has a right to forbid it," retorted Theresa, "who employs you on these grounds?"

"Mr. Bransby, Ma'am."

"Do you mean to say that that field belongs to Mr. Bransby?"

"No, Ma'am, but this path and this thicket do, and Mr. Bransby is very particular as the

shooting season comes on, as nobody walks here and rises the birds."

In an instant Theresa recollected that they had been told, when first they looked at Seaton, that awkward strips, as it were, of the property, ran into Mr. Bransby's grounds, and that in consequence, the disputes between him and the proprietors of Seaton, were endless.

Turning, therefore, indignantly away, she said—

"This shall be enquired into;" and was hastily retracing her steps home, when the keeper again accosted her.

"No offence I hope, ma'am; you know I does but act up to my orders."

"Your orders, I imagine, did not apply to *me*," said the irate Theresa, quickening her steps.

"Beg pardon, ma'am, but they was give me only yesterday, because Master heerd that the new people of Seaton was come into the house, and the last family did a deal of damage when *they* was here."

This speech, meant to be apologetic, did not mollify his audience ; it was the first indignity her haughty spirit had met since its rise to pride and power—and it rebelled accordingly.

She had now reached the little rustic bridge and gate, and turning to the keeper before she closed it upon the forbidden ground, she exclaimed—

“ You may tell your Master, that the new people of Seaton will never intrude on his grounds again, and you may say so with Mrs. Chetwode’s compliments.”

Straight home to her husband, panting with indignation, went Theresa, and recounted to him all that had passed between herself and Mr. Bransby’s game-keeper, colouring the adventure more highly than was quite truthful, and stirring up Mark’s wrath to a pitch very nearly as great as her own.

Mr. Bransby, who during his sojourn under the same roof with the Chetwode’s, had been a constant invalid, and had never exchanged two words with Mark, was nevertheless so

well known as an irritable man, and a quarrelsome and disagreeable neighbour, that the present adventure did not at first appear to Chetwode at all likely to be embellished by the glowing language of his wife; but then again, on reflection, he recollected a thousand little instances of kindness on the part of Mrs. Bransby, and a thousand little acts of attention from her to Theresa, of which the husband must at least have been cognizant, all of which made him think there must be some mistake somewhere, and that the objectionable phrase, "*the new people of Seaton*" could not possibly have been intentionally personal.

These charitable feelings were instantly condemned by Theresa as an additional insult to herself; a taking-part against her, which she most vehemently resented, and Mark was consequently subjected to a stormy scene from which there was no escape.

In vain he asked her how she could imagine that the Bransbys really wished to insult or affront her, when even at that moment, the

conservatory was indebted to their kindness for many of its choicest plants, and that in the more homely departments of dairy and farm-yard, their neighbourly attentions had been of the greatest use in stocking and supplying.

"I imagine nothing!" was the violent retort; "I only judge from the evidence of my own senses; I was exposed to great insolence from a person acting under Mr. Bransby's pointed orders, and if you choose to let such a case pass, and throw me in the way of a repetition of the indignity, why then I am only sorry the task of defending myself is left to me alone, and that I, an inexperienced and unprotected girl, am to look for protection to any soul in the world except my own husband!"

Mark was hurt at this imputation, and warmly defended himself; at the same time he did not see what steps he could take; he could hardly attack Mr. Bransby for forbidding trespassers on his own grounds; certainly he might have had the gate locked, and so indicated which path led into his property, but

then again, that was difficult, since the same gate which led to his favorite pheasant wood was also the only entrance to a large field belonging to Seaton.

An hour or more was spent in eager and animated argument, and it ended by Mark's being persuaded to go and call on Mr. Bransby and state the case to him, suggesting, if he found it practicable, that the old man should put up either another gate just beyond the opening into Chetwode's field, or else a board of notice to passengers—anything, in fact, to prevent a repetition of the annoyance it had occasioned Mrs. Chetwode.

To a man of peace, like Mark, this mission was formidable beyond expression; he felt that he had no right, a stranger, and only just arrived, to go and dictate terms to one so much his senior, and to so large a landed proprietor as Mr. Bransby, yet he had been partly talked, partly driven into it, and rather than spend any more time in an argument in which he was every instant "getting the worst of it" as the say-

ing is, he took up his hat and departed on his errand.

Mr. Bransby was at home, and received him cordially. For some time the conversation was a mutual interchange of acknowledgments and civilities, and at last Chetwode opened the subject of his visit.

As he spoke, the visage of his listener grew red; as he proceeded, it grew redder and redder, and as he concluded the storm broke over his head in a fit of such fury, accompanied with language so strong and so violent, that Mark was perfectly disgusted and dismayed.

The fat, good-tempered, full-blown face of Mr. Bransby was now all in a flame, and, at last, without having given any but the most temperate replies, Chetwode took his leave, having his farewell bow unreturned, and the bell not even rung to facilitate his exit.

Mr. Bransby considered the interference of his new neighbour as most unwarrantable and impertinent, and he did not scruple to tell him so, rendering the information all the more

forcible by uttering an oath to every sentence, therefore when Chetwode left the house he felt that he could never enter it again, and from that hour a coolness sprung up which ended, of course, in a dead cut; the story got whispered about, and Mark acquired the reputation of an interfering and troublesome neighbour; all the visiting circle soon learnt that there had been a dispute between the Chetwode's and Bransby's, and consequently, at parties and at picnics the set was now divided, for when the one family were asked to join, the other, as a matter of course, could not be included.

CHAPTER XI.

AUGUST was now dwindling to a close—the Chetwodes were fairly and comfortably established in their luxurious home—the first of September was rapidly approaching and all the guests of the different houses had changed—when Mark began to wonder if Mrs. Dering's visit also were coming to a close, and whether, and when, she intended performing the promised infliction upon the Keatings.

She showed no symptoms of departure in her own proper person, and Mark was puzzled to account for the cool composure with which she spent so many weeks in England whilst her apartments in Paris were standing vacant and consuming her "small means."

He could not bring himself to press her to

prolong her visit, for he felt he was not equal to such hypocrisy ; but this mattered little, since she stayed without being invited, and it was now becoming irksome.

He was expecting his mother and sister down at Seaton in September, and they would be succeeded by his friend Bathurst ; to confess the truth, he was anxious that the vivacious widow should depart before their arrival, for she had an officious way of doing the honours which took the office completely out of her daughter's hands, and Theresa had latterly grown so strangely indolent, that she would hardly even take the trouble to exert herself to please anybody.

The novelty of her garden, her conservatory, her hothouse, and her dairy, had all worn off, and the most interesting object in life to her, was now, the box of books which every month refreshed her mind with all the newest literature of the day.

Tired at last of waiting for some hint that Mrs. Dering was going, and not daring to ask

such a question of his wife, beneath whose very looks he began now to, *almost*, tremble, Mark resolved to satisfy himself by a direct application to Francis Keating, the first time he had an opportunity.

This occurred very shortly, and to his surprise, his brother-in-law flatly denied that Mrs. Dering had been invited to his father's house, or that either he or his family had the slightest idea of her intention of coming to them.

"It is one of her '*crams*,'" was Keating's elegant phraseology, "she knows as well as I do, that we have never asked her, nor do we intend; from the first of September, my father considers the house as his own property entirely, and apportions every room in it to men friends who want shooting; thus, get rid of her the best way you can, but if I know Mrs. Dering, you have got her safe and sound till the first of October, when her *pied-à-terre*, as she calls it, will be vacant again."

Here was *another* surprise for Chetwode;—who was now tenanting that *pied-à-terre*? had

he not himself written and renewed it for her on the old terms?

"I dare say you did," said Keating, "but the old terms comprised a privilege of underletting, and she told my wife that she had let the rooms very well indeed, till the first of October."

"And never told me!" exclaimed Chetwode greatly incensed at the concealment, "I, who am to be tormented by her presence, am kept in the dark till an accident reveals to me what I certainly had a right to know!—and how strange that she never told Theresa."

Keating was silent.

"Theresa knows nothing of this?" said Chetwode, and there was a doubting, interrogating tone in his voice, quite painful to the ear of his brother-in-law, for Keating had begun seriously to value and esteem Mark Chetwode. "She does not know of it Keating?"

"Does she not?" was the guarded reply.

"Does she?" said Chetwode, and there was a pause.

His face during that pause wore an expression as painful, as had been the tone of his voice the moment before.

“ *Does she, Keating?*” he repeated.

“ She was in the room when the subject was being canvassed, because I remember her remark; she said: ‘then we have you, tied fast, till then;’ but no invitation ever issued from *our* lips, so my dear Chetwode, I really fear——”

“ Pardon my question,” interrupted Mark, “ but is there any coolness between you?—Surely you once patronised Mrs. Dering?”

“ *I never did; I always hated her like the—* but never mind that!—the fact is, my father and mother liked her and the girls very much indeed, until it became a question of marriage between me and my wife, my little Georgy, (who, *par parenthèse*, is worth her weight in gold;) then, the true character of Mrs. Dering shone out, and she behaved so infamously, with so little tact, and so little delicacy, the evening that the settlements were being drawn up, that

my worthy old father flew in a devil of a rage, and made a complete fool of himself, as all people do who lose their temper ; but you know he has one peculiarity, and that is, he likes to keep his guineas to himself, and he did *not* like my marrying a girl who had not one, neither did he like Mrs. Dering's great anxiety that Georgy should not be entirely dependant upon me ; the money being on my side, he very properly said he should provide against the chances of a heavy jointure for my widow in the life-time of my mother—on that rock we split—people always split when they come to fighting over gold—those who have not got it, are generally grasping after all they can get.”

Keating spoke bitterly, for his heart was full of bitterness towards Mrs. Dering, but Chetwode's was full of sadness only ; sadness and mortification at this unexpected discovery of concealment on the part of his wife.

If she had begun to deceive him, or blind him, with regard to trifles, might she not some day do so in things of more consequence?—

where was it to stop?—yet, as he plodded home, musingly and wearily, he tried to think that her silence on the subject of her mother's stay had been accidental—that she never meant to conceal anything from him—that she was open as day, and that as to the letting of the Paris lodgings she might possibly think her mother had told him herself.

Still, he sighed heavily as he thought it over, and his sigh was deeper when he repeated over to himself one particular sentence spoken by Keating, with regard to Georgina—"that she was worth her weight in gold."

Perhaps he was not even aware of having sighed at this; better for him if he were not.

When he returned home, he never mentioned to any one his conversation with his brother-in-law; he did not look upon this silence in the light of a concealment!—yet it showed that there was more than one subject on which the husband and wife had not free, and unreserved, and boundless confidence, which makes the chief happiness of married life.

He avoided it altogether, and it was not till some days afterwards, that it was again brought under his notice in the course of a morning visit from Mrs. Tremlettson who asked in her usual *insonciaute* voice, when Mrs. Dering was going to the Keating's.

"I am not going to pay them a visit this year, at all," was the easy, unconstrained reply; "because my stay with my daughter Theresa has enabled me to be with both my children at once, as it were; and they are so kind, they have let me off with much less trouble than I expected, for I do not like disappointing dear friends when once I have promised."

For some time past, Mrs. Dering had been perched, according to Chetwode's mental vision, on a sort of ladder; before his marriage, that ladder had been an ascending scale, but latterly, she had been coming down the other side, step by step, but surely and steadily, and when she gave utterance to the above speech, she slid

down two at once, in his estimation, and most cordially did he then despise her.

Early in September, Mrs. Chetwode and Marian arrived at Seaton, and Mrs. Bellingham, with Mary Vere, still occupied their rooms at Ringmere.

Thus, the family meetings were constant and very pleasant, and all went on so merrily that Mark was at last beginning to be quite like himself.

The only two faces in those *réunions* which did not share the general brightness, were those of Mary Vere and Theresa.

The former, melancholy and love-sick, took no interest in what was passing round her, but wandered from morning till night, through the fields and lanes, alone with her thoughts.

And Theresa was changed ; the character of her beauty was different to what it had been, for it was now haughty, imperious, and almost discontented in expression ; Mrs. Bellingham called it discontented, and ill-tempered, but strangers said she was unhappy.

Theresa, however, was one who never made a confidence, therefore, if this were the case even, no one could judge beyond the little which the outward appearance testified. Since her marriage she had been less communicative than usual, and not even Georgina could tell if she were happy. Georgina herself would not have ventured to have asked the question.

Mrs. Chetwode saw the change directly; she told her son that Theresa had lost her spirits, and imagined, in the simplicity of her heart, that the sight of her sister, buoyant and radiant, in all the pride and happiness of her new-found delight, was rather a trial to the childless sister.

But this Mark denied, though he did so sorrowfully. Theresa disliked children, and could not enter into the enjoyment which others found in their possession.

"Sometimes I fancy she walks too much," he said; "for Mrs. Dering constantly tempts her to go to the Hall on foot—a distance of nearly five miles. But," he added, hastily, "it is no use

my saying anything; she will have her own way; therefore, my interference only annoys her."

And thus Mrs. Chetwode learnt that her son had not yet succeeded in gaining that influence over his young wife, which she had so strongly recommended him to endeavour to obtain.

Mrs. Dering went to the Hall regularly every day; when she could not have the carriage, she started early on foot, and managed to arrive just in time for luncheon, till at last this became quite a habit, and people put up with it because they could not help it.

Nevertheless, it was a great tax on her friends and neighbours, on one account, and that was, that though she could walk the distance in the morning, she was not equal to going back again on foot, so the carriage of some one nor other must convey her, and if neither the Seaton nor the Hall equipages were available, she would ask for a seat in that of any chance visitor whom she happened to encounter.

One day, after waiting till she had hardly left time enough to reach home in time to make her toilette, Mrs. Bransby called on the Keatings, and offered to drop Mrs. Dering at the lodge gates.

In the course of their drive, the former mentioned the arrival of a large party of sportsmen at Holm Park—the individual who had taken it for the shooting and hunting season having brought down a party with him, and Mrs. Bransby had left no stone unturned till she had ascertained the name of every member of the numerous body.

These she recapitulated to Mrs. Dering, who was one of those who never turn a deaf ear to any sort of information, and just as the carriage stopped at the lodge of Seaton, the last name she uttered struck Mrs. Dering.

She could ask no questions, for Theresa was walking down the avenue, and thinking it might be awkward for her to encounter Mrs. Bransby, she hastily made her *adieux*, and got not.

As they walked home together, Mrs. Dering told her daughter the news of Holm Park, being full—she thought it would enliven the neighbourhood, for the gentleman had brought down seven friends with him.

“And who in the world do you think one of the seven is?” cried the widow, “guess, Theresa!”

But Theresa was too listless, too indifferent even to attempt to guess; how should she know who this unknown Mr. Emmerson’s friends were? and why should she care?

“Because we know him, my dearest! I never was so surprised in my life, thinking he was abroad, but who should it be but Edward Sydenham!”

Edward Sydenham?—Theresa’s heart gave a sort of bound and then beat furiously; it was the sudden mention of the name, nothing else, that brought that rush of blood to her pale, transparent skin, and then left it whiter than before, for she did not believe the report was true.

"It cannot be, Mamma; it must be some mistake—you misunderstood the name."

Mrs. Dering protested that she had not; the name, and even the title 'Captain Edward Sydenham,' had been mentioned; she was certain she had heard it rightly.

"It is so improbable," said Theresa, speaking in a voice which was now so studiously listless that any one but Mrs. Dering must have discovered that it was assumed—"it is not the least likely that he should be here—it must be that Major Edward Sydney, who was staying in the house with us at Ringmere."

"But my dearest, Mrs. Bransby was staying there at the same time, so she could not have made the mistake; she knew that that man was a 'Major' and she said distinctly 'Captain.'"

"It looks like it," murmured Theresa, "yet I hardly think—"

"Well, we shall soon know!" returned her mother briskly, "for of course he will call directly he knows we are so close."

And to that, Theresa made no reply.

Would he call?—would he, if it were indeed him, would he now consent to meet her, when, a few short months before, he had first owned he thought it better not, and then gone beyond the temptation without taking her opinion as to whether the step were wise or advisable?

Theresa shut herself up in her room immediately on reaching home, and sat down in a state of nervous doubt and dread which she tried in vain to calm.

The moment (if it were really Sydenham) was now approaching when they must meet again; this time he could not fly;—how far worse to her was the prospect of this meeting after that short note which he had addressed to her in Town than it had ever been before!—the tables were changed, and it was now Theresa who would have given worlds to fly to escape the meeting, and if possible, never to see him again.

“If I could escape,” said she to herself, calyping her hands over her throbbing forehead

if I could but avoid seeing him, it would be happier for me—if, indeed, I dare use the word *happy*!—at all events I should be but as I am; if we meet again I shall be even more wretched—my life will then seem insupportable—for though it is bad enough to act my present part, it will be worse to have to act *to him*—he will see through it!”

Then came the refreshing doubt—there was just a hope—just the shadow of a doubt!—it might be Major Sydney whose name had again given rise to the mistake; but to remain in this state of uncertainty was impossible; the truth must be ascertained, and there was but one person who could be employed as an agent; it was Victor.

Before, then, there could be a chance of the encounter taking place—before, at any of the numberless dinner parties, they should suddenly and unexpectedly find themselves in the same room with each other—Victor must himself prove the identity, and, by the simple fact of his own presence, warn Sydenham of the

vicinity of her whom he had not dared to meet.

"And when we *do* meet," said Theresa inwardly "it will be as though it were the first time, for last time he did not know that I was married."

She went into her boudoir and rang the bell—she would not give herself time to think, for she knew that she could not bear to commune with herself much longer, and as it *must* be done, she would speak to Victor on the spot.

Victor alone, had the privilege of answering that boudoir bell, and he now entered so speedily that it seemed as if he had been at the very door.

Theresa was seated with her back to the light, and the sun was shining full on the peculiar countenance of her confidential servant.

"Victor," she exclaimed, in a low, rapid tone, "you must exert your ingenuity to-night or the first thing to-morrow morning, in doing me a service"...his bow was all his answer—"you must be trusty, *as usual*," Theresa continued, "and discover for me what I wish to

know; you are aware that Holm Park is let—a gentleman of the name of Emmerson has taken it—he has brought down several friends with him, and I wish you to find out, without a moment's unnecessary delay, *the names of his guests.*”

She paused, and the face of Victor suddenly lighted up.

“Madame,” he began, “it is very singular—but I this afternoon heard that amongst them was one name with which you are acquainted—will Madame permit me to lower that blind? the sun is destroying these flowers.”

“A name we know,” repeated Theresa mechanically, as he advanced to the window—“you heard a name we know?”

“I heard, Madame, that the last gentleman, who arrived last night by the Dorchester Coach, was Captain Sydenham.”

Victor stood, during the delivery of this sentence, trying to make the Venetian blinds turn the proper way, and, apparently, they would not.

"You are certain?" said the low voice.

"Quite, Madame."

"You saw him, Victor?"

"Madame, a dog-cart passed me as I stood at the Lodge gate, and Captain Sydenham's figure struck me, but his face I did not see—I was then told, Mr. Emerson had sent in to Dorchester to meet Captain Edward Sydenham who was to arrive by the coach."

"He saw you?"

"I think not, Madame."

"Then, Victor," said Theresa, after a brief pause, "you must watch your opportunity—I can give you no instructions—you must act according to circumstances—but Captain Sydenham must see *you*, and that, without delay—you understand?"

"Perfectly, Madame," but Victor lingered.

"I have nothing to say—nothing," continued Theresa, almost incoherently—"he must see you—why are you waiting?—I have not anything more to say—you may go—but re-

member—if you have any message, shall be here.”

It was done.

Victor left the room, but Theresa never saw him go ; habit made her ring for her maid, and she was dressed for dinner, but she never observed what toilet had been selected for her ; at dinner, there sat her loquacious mother, her gentle, placid mother-in-law, and that silent sister-in-law ; Victor was waiting as usual ; but was it not strange, thought Theresa to herself, that amongst the flood of small-talk which issued from Mrs. Dering's lips, the one piece of information, to which, before Theresa alone, she had appeared to attach so much importance, was never communicated to the family circle at dinner ? yet all knew the name of Edward Sydenham !

There they all sat—Mark wondering if Theresa were ill, for her more than common silence had silenced the rest ; yet to her, so great was the confusion of her brain, and the

tumult in her breast, that that quiet dinner seemed the noisiest at which she had ever sat, and every time any one spoke, she started.

"She is ill," said Mrs. Chetwode to her son.

"She has something on her mind," said Mrs. Bellingham, who came to spend the evening, yet Mark could do nothing; he dared not question her, for he remembered too well the sharp way she had once told him that she was never ill, and as to there being anything on her mind—that was a dagger in his heart.

That evening after dinner, it being one of those soft, sweet, balmy evenings which are of rare occurrence, the whole party took chairs and sat out on the lawn, and as they sat there, carriage wheels were heard approaching.

Mrs. Dering looked at her daughter with a smile, but Theresa's colour was changing so rapidly from red to white, that the smile gave place to a look of alarm, when suddenly the Keating carriage, and Georgy's welcome face was seen.

All liked Georgy—all were delighted to see

her, and this was the first time she had been able to come as far as Seaton.

"The air was so sultry, and the evening so delicious," she said, "that I ventured to come for an hour, uninvited."

She seated herself close to her sister, and evidently hoped she should have a moment's conversation with her, but everything conspired against this. Mark was plotting and planning to secure her to himself for a few minutes to speak and consult with her upon Theresa's depression of spirits; Mrs. Chetwode wanted to draw her attention to her sister's variable complexion, and Mrs. Bellingham wished to cut short Mrs. Dering's empty nonsense about foreign habits, and French society.

Thus, Georgina was besieged, and there was no help for it.

Theresa herself was the most unconcerned of the group; she looked on with a smile, and knew perfectly well for what reason Georgina had driven over to Seaton at that unusual hour; her sister's zeal amused her, and roused in her a

determination to hide, even more than ever, every emotion and every sentiment which might betray her inward feelings.

She was certain in her own mind, from being so well versed in Georgy's open countenance, that that kind and anxious heart was exerting itself just then in her cause; she saw that Georgy knew of the dangerous arrival in the neighbourhood, but why should she take so much trouble to inform her, (or endeavour so to do) of it, she did not fully comprehend, till she said—

“One of my reasons for coming over was to tell you all before-hand of a projected dinner party at the hall—all the married ladies here present are to be asked, but you, Mamma, being a widow, and dear Marian, being neither wife nor widow, are to be asked in the evening, chaperoned by Miss Vere, we hope; Mrs. Belingham is to be the exception, which all general rules have, because Major Keating thinks you know his friend Mr. Emmerson, who has just taken Holm Park.”

Mrs. Bellingham said she knew Mr. Emerson's family, but not himself; he was the "black sheep" of them all, and had acquired a great reputation from having three times in his life induced them to pay debts for him, which would have ruined half the families in England.

"The same person," said Georgy, "and he has brought down a retinue of dogs and horses which have kept the Dorchester road quite alive, Francis tells me; he has also several friends staying with him, and Major Keating has actually invited them all."

She said this in so marked a manner that Theresa looked up hastily; this was what Georgy wished; she had been trying to catch her sister's eye, and now their glances met; that of Georgina was firm, unflinching and full of meaning; Theresa's, on the contrary, was startled, and vacillating, and soon shrank from the protracted gaze it met.

When Georgina rose to take leave, it was

Theresa's arm that wrapped the shawl round her, and their hands met.

"You know?" whispered the former with a momentary grasp.

"Yes—within the last few hours," was the answer, and they parted.

CHAPTER XII.

"THERESA, my dearest, may I enter?" were the words of Mark Chetwode, the next morning, when his wife had, as usual retreated to her boudoir after breakfast and shut herself in.

"Enter, for a second," she answered, with an attempt at playfulness; "but I am going to be very busy this morning."

"I will not intrude a moment. I merely wished just to ask you if you have any idea where Victor is? He went out immediately after he had brushed my clothes this morning, they say, and has not returned—is it not very strange? Have you not observed that he has absented himself very much lately, and appeared quite indifferent to his duties?"

"It is more likely," said Theresa, "that you

are growing indifferent to him—you know you never liked Victor, in your heart.”

“I own it; but I have retained him, thinking, as you once gave me reason to suppose, that on our return to England, Mrs. Dering would reclaim him.”

“Never, with my consent. Mamma does not want him, and if she did, I could not spare him. I like no one to wait on me so well as Victor, and having had him about me from childhood, you cannot suppose I shall allow him to be dismissed from caprice now.”

This was the first time Theresa had ever showed her despotism in the affairs of the household, and her tone was so firm and unpleasant, that Chetwode, accustomed as he was to all her tempers, was surprised at the petulance she displayed on the present occasion. He was annoyed too, at the new discovery that Victor was to be an everlasting appendage to his establishment, for there was something about him he disliked so exceedingly that he had been quite counting upon Mrs. Dering's

departure, as the only sure means of ridding himself of two torments at once.

Now, this hope was dashed to the ground ; but though silenced on that head, he could not refrain from again resuming the conversation at the original point.

"Nevertheless, my dearest, he should not absent himself in this way, without permission. Yesterday he was out till just before dinner, and my room was not ready for me when I went to dress. Where could he have been?"

"Good gracious, Mark! how in the world am I to know?"

"Then, again this morning—where can he have gone? Did you send him out?"

This was a home-question, and one for which Chetwode waited a reply—there was no time for hesitation, for the husband's eyes were fixed steadily on his young wife's face.

"I!" exclaimed Theresa. "Do you suppose I would have subjected myself to all this *tirade*—all this loss of time, if I had thought that by

just saying 'I sent him out' I should have been spared the interruption?"

"Then you did not?"

"Do you doubt my word? Do you suspect some mystery beneath the simple fact of Victor having gone out, without asking leave?—perhaps gone just to the garden, for my flowers."

Mark was provoked; he wished to say more—then he thought he had better not—then he hesitated—and at last—his usual resource—he left the room, and Theresa breathed freely again.

From her presence he went to his own study on the ground-floor, and just as he was about to close the door, he heard a very light tread advancing through the hall. Thinking it might be Mrs. Dering, and his position commanding a view of the stair-case which she must ascend, he paused, to avoid the apparent rudeness of shutting the door in her face, and as he stood, irresolute, he saw, to his surprise, that the light tread was that of Victor.

Mark could not quite say that the stealthy step was intentional, but his glance around him as he mounted the stairs, was certainly one of reconnoitre and caution, and his next movement was to take from the breast of his coat a note, and pause at Theresa's boudoir-door.

On the impulse of the moment, without reflection, Chetwode hastily emerged, and looking up the stairs, he said,

"Is that note for your mistress, Victor?"

"No, Monsieur," was the answer; "for Mrs. Dering;" and he proceeded up-stairs, towards the rooms appropriated to the widow.

Though he was now satisfied that it was his mother-in-law who so coolly monopolised the services of Victor, there was a disagreeable impression on Chetwode's mind that his valet was about to knock at Theresa's door, when his own rash question frustrated the intention, and that if he had been a moment later he should have been able to satisfy himself as to who was to appropriate that note. If it were, indeed, for Mrs. Dering, why should Victor

seem so very near demanding admittance to the boudoir, which Mrs. Dering rarely ever entered.

How unlike Mark Chetwode, to have all these suspicions; how foreign to his nature to suppose any one guilty of deceit and falsehood unless actually detected in such offences; but he had begun to doubt and distrust Victor, and very often he caught himself declaring, in his own mind, that he was the sort of man whom he would not believe on his oath.

Shut up in his study, an hour passed in solitary musings, and then it suddenly occurred to him that a note of invitation from Ringmere asking him to join a *battue* there that week, remained unanswered in his pocket. Though he meant to accept, he did not like quite to bind himself without acquainting Theresa, so he once more sallied up, and instead of his usual mode of asking admittance, he uttered her name.

There was no answer; he repeated, still louder, "Theresa!"—and still all was silence.

Never imagining for a moment that she could be in the room, and yet not answer him when he called her, he opened the door very quietly, to see if she were standing out on the little verandah which led down to the garden by steps, or if she were asleep.

Neither. On the same sofa where he had left her reclining, an hour of two previously, she still sat, but on the table before her she had rested her arms, and buried in them was her face, whilst, at rapid intervals, there issued smothered sobs, which, though low and suppressed, were so fraught with anguish, that it was all Chetwode could do to restrain himself from rushing forward and catching her in his arms.

But he checked himself—or rather an object on that table had power to check him;—one glance at a note, lying half open before her, was the bar that interposed itself between the husband and wife—in that note he recognised the very missive that Victor had taken from the breast of his coat as he ascended the stair.

case, and as he had been struck by its singular shape when he saw it then for the first time, so was he now transfixed to the spot to recognise it again in the possession of her for whom Victor had so distinctly said it was *not* intended.

The note, in the first place, was sealed with rather a large black seal; in the next, it was written on very coarse looking blue wove paper; lastly, its shape, being three cornered, yet folded very large, had had enough of singularity in it to arrest his attention, and cause him to know that it was the same he had seen before.

He would not speak to her—he would not rouse her—yet he felt he might do both and insist upon knowing the reason of her grief; but he did neither; at that moment his heart experienced a sudden revulsion, and his feelings towards her took a turn which they never recovered again, and he left her presence as quietly as he had entered it, mystified, chilled, displeased, and estranged!

There was worse than coldness between them

now;—there was worse than the unlimited power of love on her side, and the boundless submission generated by that love, on his;—years might subdue the despotism of the one, and strengthen the weakness of the other, but there was that between them now, which years would only render more serious and more sad—a mystery, and a secret, and the consciousness of this was almost the last drop of gall in Chetwode's cup of bitterness, at least he wondered if he should ever have to learn that there was one more bitter still, and if he should ever live over the moment when he should have to taste it, saying to himself: "I have lost her heart—it is the last drop in the cup!"

But to return to Theresa.

Victor, according to the instructions so faintly conveyed, but so fully comprehended, had left Seaton the moment he had fulfilled his duties of the morning, and walking swiftly towards Holm Park, he entered its shady avenues, just about the hour when all the

world who are neither early nor late, would be waiting for breakfast.

As fate would have it, the first figure he saw, strolling across the lawn in the direction of himself, was he for whom he was looking, and in another instant he saw that he was recognised.

The meeting was hurried, for loud voices were issuing through the open windows, but a great deal can be said in a short space of time, if the speakers are earnest; and it ended by Sydenham desiring Victor to wait in the shrubberies whilst he himself re-entered the house to write a note.

That note was now before Theresa, and from the paroxysm of emotion into which the first perusal of it had thrown her, she now raised herself to read it once again, utterly unconscious that in the abandonment of her grief, an eye had rested on her from which, in conscience, she could expect no pity, and a heart

had judged her, from which, if she met her deserts, she could hope for no mercy.

And now she read once more, those dangerous lines :

“ A destiny, which I see it is vain to resist, has again led me almost into your presence, and a power, against which I can no longer contend, has willed that we are to meet. Be it so, Theresa ;—you will despise me when you know how I have tried to shun all chance of such a meeting !—how I have felt that I would fly anywhere—after that one brief interview in town and its dreadful *dénouement*—rather than encounter you again ; you will despise me still more when I tell you, that want of courage to see you as you are, has been the sword that has driven me from you whenever there was a prospect of my even seeing you at a distance !—I felt I could not bear it—yet now, the dreaded moment has arrived, and there is no escape.

“ The fortunate chance that led Victor to Holm Park has however, in part, paved the way, and broken the shock which it would have been to me to have found myself in your presence, unprepared to greet you as becomes our altered positions.

“ You may be happy, Theresa ; you have new ties, new interests, and the world has been opening to

you, whilst to me, it seemed to close from the moment I learnt that I had lost you ; *I* have formed no new ties ; I have had not a single interest in life ; I have lived on your memory, and my heart seemed to die when I found that it had become sinful, almost sinful, even to remember you !—but there were days—blessed days gone for ever—when I think I was not indifferent to you ;—by the memory of those days I now implore you Theresa, not to let our first meeting be in public ;—do not let idle eyes witness the weak but unconquerable tremor I shall feel at seeing you again ; I am told we are to be at Major Keating's on Saturday next—before that day, I implore you to let me speak to you for five minutes. Appoint your own time—name any spot however distant—tell me but the day, and the hour, and for a few brief moments, suffer me to speak to you again.”

The error into which her indiscretion had led her, was now fully apparent to Theresa, and yet she had no strength to refuse the request contained in that letter.

The path of duty was wide open before her, and she saw her right course as plainly as if she had been one of the most immaculate of wives, yet she knew and felt that she should not take

it, simply because she could not, would not see the harm of acceding to what she considered a reasonable request, and one founded on prudence and kindness—yes, kindness to herself as well, though he who had made it seemed to think that no caution was necessary *for her*!—he had dwelt on her new ties, her new interests, and, *her happiness*!—all these, he insinuated, had made the meeting easy and painless *to her*, but the feelings he would spare, and the heart that required steeling, was his own.

“Let him think so,” she said to herself, as she penned the hasty lines which removed the safe-guard from the chasm at her feet—“let him think so as long as it be possible—it is better for both that he should!” and the note was given, to be delivered at some convenient season; the day, the hour, and the place, were all appointed, and when that was done, she joined her family circle without any of those bitter gnawings of conscience which one might suppose would naturally have tormented her.

But she had silenced her conscience—she

had quenched the monitory voice—and the power that worked so great an effect, was the principle inculcated by her friend, Mrs. Templar, and her own mother!

“As a lover, I will not countenance him! but as *a friend*, I will always retain him.”

Here, then, was the dangerous maxim suddenly brought to trial, and likely soon, to be put in full play.

As Theresa entered the room where her guests, her mother, and her husband, were waiting for her appearance at luncheon, the eyes of the latter fixed themselves on her with a glance of the most searching scrutiny, but the beautiful countenance told no tales; it was as calm and as untroubled as though it had never known a care or a sorrow, and Chetwode was more mystified than ever; he felt almost as if he had been dreaming, when he compared her present aspect with the scene he had witnessed in her boudoir.

Re-assured, however, for the moment, by her placid appearance, he soon introduced the

subject of Lord Rydal's invitation to shoot, and as he read her the note, they strolled out on the lawn together, and sat down at some distance.

At first, Theresa did not see that the invitation was to her husband only, and she said she fancied there was some engagement for that day, upon which Mark explained that it was a gentleman's party, and that she was not included.

A flush rose to her forehead as he made this announcement, and she indignantly exclaimed—

"You do not mean to say that they have asked you to shoot, and dine, and sleep, and never included me at all?—there must be some mistake."

Mark assured her that in the shooting season this was an invitation of frequent occurrence, and the wives of those who formed the party for a *battue* were very rarely asked too.

"But to dine—and to sleep!—is it possible that you contemplated acceding to such a pro-

position for a single moment?" she asked with increasing warmth—"do you really propose countenancing a slight, so coolly put upon your wife, and actually accepting so insulting an invitation? one, from which, in the most pointed manner, I am cut out? well! if you do this, Mark, I *shall* be surprised!"

Chetwode pleaded that it was the custom of country life—it was so usual a form of invitation that no wife in England would feel herself aggrieved at her husband's being offered a seat at the quiet family board, and a bachelor's room for the night, after a hard day's sport, and so, as he really wished to go, having no shooting of his own, he hoped she would not make him feel that he was acting unkindly in accepting, but on the contrary, agree with him that he could not well say no.

"That I certainly shall not do!" Theresa exclaimed—"nothing shall make me agree to what I consider a defiance of all the usages of society; if I am to be considered quite a distinct person from yourself, and if you are to

be asked out to dinner whenever people have an empty chair, and do not choose to be encumbered with your wife, why then—”

“ My dearest, that is putting it in a very erroneous light,” interrupted Chetwode.

“ I am sorry you think so,” she returned—

“ I am sorry my views of the unity of married people do not agree with yours; you will do as you like, of course, and you will doubtless end by being asked to every house in the county, *without me*;— thus, your bachelor days will return with all their brightness, and she who is tied to you by every law, both human and divine, must learn from your virtuous example, that when people have been married a certain time, their unity ceases; they are no longer considered *one*, and the husband is the very first to assure the world that the path of life trodden by himself and his wife, is only the same so long as it suits his convenience!”

Mark was one of those who, rather than argue would at any time willingly give up his own point, and though on the present occasion

he was vexed and disappointed, he did not think his day's shooting was worth a dispute with his wife; he felt it would be paying much too dear for his pleasure, therefore after a very few more words, he gave up, and retired to his study to write an excuse to Lord Rydal, framed in language as little approaching a falsehood as possible.

In this art, he was still awkward, and the apology was clumsily worded, so much so that the Earl, annoyed at the loss of a gun, took the note to his wife, and was glad that she cordially agreed with him, that through every sentence, the superior will of Theresa shone out.

And yet, a few hours afterwards, in the delicious cool of the evening, when the dark shadows were lengthening across the paths, and the busy sounds of day in the country—wheels and sheep-bells, and carter's whistling—were nearly hushed, did not she, who had so warmly advocated the 'unity of married life,' steal unaccompanied into the woods and lanes?

Did not she, who would suffer no breach of those usages of society which she averred prohibited the appearance in public of a man, without his wife, meet one, not her husband, by the river walk—and sit there, on the knotted roots of those fine old chesnut trees, deep in conversation with one who had once been dearer than he, on whose devotion she so strenuously insisted?—her swimming eyes averted, her hand—perhaps unconsciously, perhaps reluctantly—clasped in his?—talking over by-gone days—explaining away by-gone misunderstandings, and settling plans for the future, when each was to meet—as far as the eyes of the world might judge—as *strangers*.

Was not this the same Thereza?—she whose sentiment, on the binding nature of the tie of marriage, were praiseworthy and sacred in her husband's sight, although certainly he was inclined to think she carried them, in the case in question, rather too far.

Yes—it was Thereza; but before the moment

when it was her custom again to rejoin the family group, she had returned to her place at home, and the surface of those deep waters looked calm and smooth as ever.

Some days passed, and then came the one on which the Chetwodes were engaged to dine at Major Keating's.

They went round by Ringmere and took up Mrs. Bellingham, and then drove on towards the Hall.

"I wish Theresa had not all those wrappings on," remarked Chetwode with a proud smile, as he saw his aunt glance up at a beautiful cluster of natural flowers in her hair—"she has the prettiest dress to-day that I ever saw; quite new, I believe, and becomes her more than any I ever beheld."

"Equipped for conquest, I suppose," said Mrs. Bellingham rather maliciously, and whilst a blush rose to Theresa's cheek, and a curl appeared on her lip, her husband, who was in high spirits that day (for a wonder,) exclaimed,

"The conquests have begun already then, for really I never saw her look better."

"I like wives to dress to please their husbands," remarked Mrs. Bellingham shortly.

"I am sure mine must," returned Chetwode, "for certainly her dress always pleases me; only to-night, more than usual."

Was there any pang at the young heart when these words fell from the husband's lips? —who can tell!... hers was a countenance which never told a tale, and the slight flush which the conversation had called up, looked only like a tinge of red light from the sun, setting on the tops of the gilded trees.

Major Keating liked giving large parties; it was the custom of the neighbourhood to form into small sets, but he set this rule at defiance, and always made up eighteen, or twenty, to do justice to his dinners.

When the Chetwodes entered, the room was full; Georgina advanced more hastily than usual to take her sister's arm, and whisper some brief remark, and Mark went through the

ceremony of being introduced to the strangers, till it came to the sentence, "The rest I think you know."

He looked round the circle and bowed to those he knew, when suddenly his eyes rested on one figure, standing by Theresa, yet not speaking to her, of whose features he had an indistinct recollection.

Everybody, however, was now talking, and the din which always precedes a great dinner in a small house, made Chetwode hesitate to whom to address a question, till he saw that Mrs. Bellingham was the most unoccupied person, and to her he turned.

"Tell me who that is, by Theresa," said he, "the face haunts me—I am sure I ought to know it, yet I cannot recall his name; you, who know every soul, my dear aunt, do tell me."

"Is this pretence, or forgetfulness?" asked the old lady sarcastically.

"Not the former, certainly!—why should I pretend?"

"Ah, that you know best!—but it is rather strange that you have forgotten that young man."

"I have not forgotten him, for I am sure I ought to know him quite well, only his name has escaped me."

"I can tell you that, then," said Mrs. Bellingham, "it is Captain Sydenham."

Chetwode did not start nor change colour, nor did a muscle of his countenance move, but his heart beat till he almost panted, and he felt too giddy for the moment, to stir from the spot where he stood. Till then, he had no idea how great a shock that name could give him, and in that short instant of powerful emotion, the whole hoard of fear and doubt and anguish of months, spoke out!

But the emotion was only momentary;—before the keenest eye could have observed it, he had crossed the room, and with perfect composure and self-command was introducing himself to his acquaintance of other days.

And Theresa sat listening to the conver-

tion between one who had once been her lover and him who was now her husband; that she did **not** listen unmoved, will be readily understood by any who have been similarly placed... and in addition, she felt that every word uttered by each, was a blow upon her now trembling conscience.

"I had no idea you were in this neighbourhood," was Chetwode's greeting, "have you been long here? are you staying in the house?"

"I have been very remiss in not calling," was the reply, "but I hope you will make allowances for a sportsman; I came down for some shooting, and am staying with Mr. Emerson."

"Have you been long here? when did you arrive?"

"I arrived on Monday."

Like lightning there shot into Chetwode's brain a vision of the *Tuesday morning*—Victor stealing upstairs—the note—and the scene in the boudoir—and yet he could go on conversing!—

"Have you had good sport?"

"I am not much of a sportsman," said Sydenham evasively, for as yet, his gun had not been in his hand; "indeed I have had so little practice of late years."

"You have been travelling?—abroad, I believe?"

"Partly-- and partly in Ireland, where I was detained some months by the death of a near relative."

Dinner was at that moment announced, but not before Chetwode recollected *the black seal on the note!*

If ever human heart, good and naturally charitable, yet harboured, involuntarily, the most bitter and intense hatred against an enemy, it was Chetwode's then, and thenceforward, against Edward Sydenham! he could not tell why, for he was in no state to bear to ask himself the reason—he only knew that his rival stood there, calmly and proudly, by that beautiful wife, whose faultless appearance and careful toilet had, but one short half hour before,

elicited from his gratified and unsuspecting lips, such delighted praise.

Now, a question rose in his mind, suddenly—almost fiercely—“*for whom* had she decked that loveliness so studiously?”—not for her husband’s applauding eyes—not for him.

No—she had not thought of him; she had no thoughts for him now—otherwise, would she have thus concealed Sydenham’s vicinity? She must have known it, for now he recollected that on entering the room, they did not meet as if it had been a surprise to either, or a first meeting. No—they must have met before. The agony of that thought, no tongue can tell.

Theresa!—Theresa!—she was all that he had ever loved on earth—and how deeply, how unutterably he had done so! Could it be possible that the last bitter drop of all was now in the cup, and the cup at his lips, and that she was forsaking him!

What thoughts these were for a dinner-party—what an isolated being that was who sat so

mute and so miserable in the midst of a festive scene. No wonder his neighbour felt indignant, and no wonder she all at once exclaimed, "I see society has done you no good, Mark; you are just as stupid as ever you were."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE summer had died away; autumn had clothed the rich woods round Seaton, with all its gorgeous tints, and at last, some 'sere and yellow' leaves had come shivering to the ground, but still, beneath the roof of Mark Chetwode, Mrs. Dering lingered.

The first of October had long passed—her apartments in Paris had long been vacant; the uncertainty of her stay in England had deprived her of the dear delight of turning a few more honest pennies by letting them for another term—yet still she lingered on at Seaton.

Will it be believed that her residence there was now compulsory? that owing to the entreaties of her host—of Mark Chetwode—she had prolonged her stay from day to day,

until she began counting up her lost francs, as if each were a drop of cherished hearts'-blood.

Without even the satisfaction of seeing the reason of her detention, she was yet implored to remain on what appeared to her an insufficient plea—the health of Theresa.

“Indeed, dear Mr. Chetwode, there is nothing the matter with my darling, except, perhaps, a touch of “*les vapeurs noirs*,” consequent upon so long a residence in the country; take her to Town, and she will be quite herself again.”

Was that apparently fond mother blind? thought Chetwode often, and often, to himself; did she not see what he saw, and date her daughter's altered looks and depressed spirits from a time seared in his own heart? it is possible that that lynx-eyed mother had never known of an attachment existing in that young daughter's heart, previous to her union with himself? could it be, that Theresa alone had

deceived him? that in that culpable act, the mother had no part?

It might be so! he could not tell! despair was in his own heart, and that was an all-absorbing feeling; he felt for no one but himself now, so selfish is grief, and all his anxiety was, to preserve around that once-beloved object, the semblance of a decorum which she had at last actually begun, by her manners in public, openly to defy!

But to herself, Chetwode had never spoken. Day by day, hour by hour, he had seen the growth of the evil, and seen his idolized Theresa standing in the shadow of the deadly upas tree—yet he had not spoken.

The neighbourhood had seen what their light lips called “the flirtation,” and had made their comments; Chetwode knew this, and he shunned society; yet to his wife, he had not spoken.

Georgina, bathed in tears, had secretly remonstrated with her sister, and Francis Keating had openly told Mark that the affair was

exciting attention, and should be stopped; but to the one, Theresa said,

At all events as my husband says nothing, no one else has a right to speak."

To the other, Chetwode had answered,

"I cannot talk to her on the subject; it is killing me by inches, but I will die the death, rather than elicit one word from those lips, which can make me think she loves me no longer; the conviction would be death;—the uncertainty—the hope, that I may yet prevail, I can just bear."

So Mrs. Dering, as her mother, was implored to remain, and she did, till at last, Sydenham left the neighbourhood, after a stay of six weeks, and then she requested to be emancipated.

She went; she took leave of her daughter with a promise to return to England should Mr. Chetwode fulfil a plan he had of taking a house for the winter, in Town, and when she was fairly gone, Mark wrote off for his friend Bathurst to come without delay.

It had come to this! he could not support the *tête-à-tête* of even a day with his wife! he could not raise his eyes to the touching beauty of those pallid, listless features—he could not converse, and listen to the low tones of that melancholy voice—how could he converse with her? how could he ever talk to her on indifferent subjects, when his heart was bursting with its agony? when the only sentence ever uppermost, was,

“Theresa! give me back the love I once thought mine!—even if those days were deceptive, give back the dream!”

And she too was wretched; her very movements told it; Chetwode saw that he could no longer make her happy, and such was the state of affairs, when Bathurst, in prompt compliance with his friend’s wish, arrived at Seaton.

He knew, partly, the purpose for which he was summoned; he knew that his friend was unhappy—that his dreams of domestic bliss had proved fallacious, and that he required consolation, if not advice and support; but when—

after a minute detail of all that had passed at Seaton during the last two months, and after a partial insight into the questionable state of his friend's married felicity, even before that period, the whole circumstances were laid open to the cool clear judgment of Bathurst, his surprise that matters should have been permitted to reach this crisis, was unbounded; he had hardly words to express his astonishment at Chetwode's unaccountable quiescence, almost amounting to acquiescence, and his miraculously passive endurance of conduct, which would have driven any other husband nearly distracted.

“ And so I have been !” he exclaimed, when thus upbraided, “ I have nursed my grief in secret, but it has nearly maddened me !”

“ And yet, you have been silent ?”

“ Yes—for no one ever loved as I did!—nothing was ever so strong as my love, except perhaps my hope;—you may wonder, but I do still hope;—yes—I hope, and shall do so till the last gasp, that her affections are not irre-

claimable – God knows, that could the faintest symptom of love for me, re-appear on her part, how gladly and thankfully she should again possess all I ever bestowed on her, for though she has been thoughtless, she is innocent—though she has been tempted, I would stake my existence that she has not permitted one word to be breathed to her, to which, as my wife, she ought not to have listened.”

“In that case,” answered Bathurst coldly, “why are you so wretched?”

“Because I see she never loved me—she loved another—and I never guessed it!” cried Chetwode almost gnashing his teeth, “had I known it, I would have resigned her at the very altar—you know I would!”

“Yes!” said Bathurst, shaking his head mournfully, “I know you well, my good friend—I know all you suffer; but as a friend, I declare to you, that your own conduct throughout this affair, appears to me as culpa-

ble, and as neglectful, as it is incomprehensible."

"Neglectful? when I have watched her looks by night, and by day—when I lived a life of anguish beyond words, simply because I would not, could not, grieve or wound her, by remonstrance?"

"There lay your great error;—a word in time—an exhortation, such as a husband alone could speak—would probably have arrested the mischief; besides, there were so many ways of speaking your mind without attacking any particular point of feeling—Mrs. Mark Chetwode perhaps, would not have listened unmoved, or been totally indifferent, to hints, as to the remarks and censure, which you say the neighbourhood have lavished on her—why did you not use that as a weapon?"

"Others repeated these things to her—her sister for one—but she was indignant—stung to the quick—thank Heaven, it was not I who stung her!"

"Ah! there it is!" exclaimed Bathurst im-

patiently, "there is the rock on which you have split!—your wife has acquired over you that fatal ascendancy, which has now, both tied your tongue, and your hands!—you have yielded so long, that now you are powerless; and how, in such a case, you can possibly act so as to help yourself, God only knows! for I am sure I do not!"

"If you cannot advise me what to do," returned Chetwode, "tell me at least what you think I might have done?"

"Removed Mrs. Chetwode from an intercourse which it appears, she had not strength of mind sufficient to shun."

"In the midst of our engagements!—of our new circle!—of the shooting season!—thus giving still more food for busy remarks, and wondering comments?"

"Harmless ones, at all events—comments which could in no wise have reflected on the character of one whose honour you are bound to guard at the expense of life itself!"

“ Her honour ?” cried Mark Chetwode colouring deeply, “ I would stake her honour against my soul !—now hear me Bathurst—hear what I solemnly swear !—that insinuation goes tingling through my views like fire,—but hear what is my firm, my irrevocable resolution ;—if ever, at any future time, a question,—a single doubt,—be it ever so faint—should arise in my mind on that point, from that moment, I part from her I have so idolized !—from that instant, I have looked my last on her, and from that hour, till we meet again face to face in another world, I will never suffer her to stand in my presence again !—judge from this—judge from what you know of my character—if I will not keep my word !”

“ I hope you will,” said Bathurst, “ and I also hope, should your weakness overtake you in that awful hour, that I may be near, to aid you in your resolution ; I only wish I could prevail on you to breathe to your wife, as a warning, the words you have just uttered to me ; if you did that, I should look forward to

your future career with more satisfaction than I confess I do now, and with more hope as to its proving happier."

But to this, Chetwode made no reply;—he felt himself, and his friend saw, that to this task he was unequal; he had never yet spoken to Theresa on the subject, and he could not begin now; he had never told her, whilst she was pursuing the course, so painful, and so objectionable to him, that he disapproved it, and begged it might be changed, and now, it was late in the day to begin!—he wished from his soul that he had found courage to speak before—to strike while the iron was hot—but he had not, and Theresa had had it in her power to screen herself, by the daring and defying exclamation—

"As long as my husband says nothing, no one has a right to speak!"

It was unfortunate that Theresa knew so well, that the reason Chetwode "said nothing," was, he could not brave the bursts of anger which his gentlest remonstrance always called

forth,—he could not brook that flashing eye, that scornful lip, and those many bitter, heartless words!—he shrank from them, he shunned them, and he *said nothing*, and Theresa “laid the flattering unction to her soul,” that she might act in all respects with impunity, for that her husband would be afraid to speak!

She never asked herself whether there would ever be an end to all this—whether he, whom she seemed to look upon as a crushed worm, would ever writhe, and turn, and re-assert his strength, his power, and his authority.

No. Proud in the haughty consciousness of supremacy, she went her way, and never looked to the end; esteem did not check her, nor love bind her, neither did respect control her; so she went on in her independence, whilst the steady, searching eye of Bathurst watched her every look, and weighed her every word.

When Bathurst had been about a week in the house, he had made himself master of all its mysteries, and what with his own observations, and the remarks of the neighbourhood

which met him in all directions, he began to see that Victor and Theresa were two who stood alone on their own high ground, whilst the rest of the household were in secret opposition to them—one and all.

There were two distinct parties—one for the master, one for the mistress. On Chetwode's side, the supporters were numerous;—on Theresa's, there was Victor.

Victor had constantly long, low conversations, in his own language, with Theresa, and every one knew that he reported to her every circumstance, however minute, which occurred in the establishment; thus, he was looked upon as a sort of spy, and beloved accordingly.

By his fiat, servants were kept, or servants discharged, and the comfort of a steady and permanent household was unknown to Mark Chetwode.

Bathurst, short as had been his stay in the neighbourhood, had, nevertheless, made so favourable an impression, partly by his agreeable manners, and partly by the reputation

which had now now begun to attach itself to his name, that a great deal of attention was paid him, and all those to whom he had been introduced on his former visit, now vied with each other in inviting him to their houses, to shoot, dine, and sleep, after the fashion of the sporting season.

By this means, all the various remarks upon the Seaton *ménage* reached him, and all the divers opinions as to the felicity of Mark Chetwode and his lovely wife, were wafted to him, sometimes by chance and sometimes intentionally. It was Mrs. Tremlett-Tremlettson who first spoke open'y to him of Theresa's conduct. "It may not have been incorrect," she said, "because that is a very strong word, but it was imprudent and thoughtless, considering that she is not a person who could be passed in a crowd; I assure you, Mr. Bathurst, people talked so at last, that I did not feel justified in asking Captain Sydenham here when the Chetwodes were expected, and since I heard that this

“ine of action gave dissatisfaction I at last refrained from asking any of them !”

Then Lady Rydal had a gentle word to say, though it was spoken reluctantly and almost tearfully.

“I pitied that young creature, Mr. Bathurst—from my soul, I pitied her, when I was told that Captain Sydenham had been a favoured admirer once ; but I pitied, and still do pity, our good and excellent cousin Mark, still more. What an awful waking for him, after such a dream ; and the worst of it was, that though there might have been no harm in it, people would talk and make remarks, and my husband is strict—in short, just for want of some kind, candid friend, to whisper caution and prudence in that beautiful girl’s ear, we—or rather I—was compelled to forego the pleasure I had anticipated, of seeing a great deal of her.”

Two good houses closed against the Chetwodes—and then came Mrs. Bransby.

“ Ah, Mr. Bathurst, no power can prevent

the whispers to which imprudence gives rise. I know too well, myself, what it is to have one's domestic occurrences made the subject of conversation, so I feel deeply for the sufferer in the case—I mean for the innocent partner, be it the husband or the wife; not but what I believe Mrs. Chetwode to be irreproachable, except as far as appearances go—appearances should be so scrupulously attended to. I am sure, if you had but been in this neighbourhood when I had a certain governess domiciled here—the meekest, mildest-looking creature—and yet—”

Mr. Bathurst sat, apparently listening intently to the story of the governess, but his thoughts, in reality, far away; he was, in spirit, at Seaton, appealing to the heedless, reckless young wife, and preaching firmness almost verging on severity, to the weak and yielding husband.

This was his vision; but when his wandering mind returned to its ‘work-o'-day frame,’ and when, next morning, he again found himself in

the society of his host and hostess, the courage of his dreamy state had forsaken him, and he felt how difficult and how delicate a task it is to interfere between husband and wife. Often and often he wished that some happy opening would offer itself, by which a few judicious warnings might be breathed into the ear of the calm, proud, apparently passionless creature who sat before him from morning till night, in all her cold loveliness, as if no emotion had ever stirred her heart, and no tenderness ever softened it. He wished he could summon courage to tell her of the false position in which she had placed herself—shunned by those to whom alone she could look for society, and spoken of with scarcely less severity than if, in very deed, she had scandalized the circles in which she moved.

Yet, in spite of her folly, Bathurst pitied her; she was so changed since that evening in Hill-street, when, for the first time, he was introduced to her, and dined in her company, that he could see she had suffered, and he was

sorry for it; she was very beautiful, and he was not an icicle, consequently, his whole thoughts and energies were now directed towards restoring her to peace, by calling on her strength of mind, and rousing her to the exercise of those good principles which, *her husband said*, she possessed. If Bathurst was sceptical on this point, Chetwode was not to blame.

How the first step was to be taken, and the first word spoken, he did not know, but he trusted to chance for an opportunity, and was contented to bide his time.

Theresa's quick and penetrating eye had soon discovered that she was an object of scrutiny and deep interest to her husband's friend, and she was indignant at it; they were, therefore, each playing their own game, and the more Bathurst appeared bent on unravelling her perplexing character, the more determined she was, that, as far as she was concerned, he should be blind, deaf and dumb.

"I know him now so well!" she exclaimed to her sister one day, "I know him far better

than he thinks he knows me!—he is forming a method by which Mark is to govern me, little dreaming that I have only to hold up my finger, and Mark must obey!”

“Do not be too sure of that!” cried Georgina warmly, “it may prove a dangerous, a fatal delusion :—Mr. Bathurst holds over your husband the powerful influence of years—do not be too sure, yet, that he has lost one atom of it!”

“Compared to mine,” returned Theresa, with equal warmth, “his influence is nothing—look here,” she added, holding up the small finger round which ran the narrow circlet of gold, the type of the vow which should be irrevocable—“look at my wedding ring—it is too tight for me...a bad omen”...and she laughed bitterly—“but it always was;—I only wish to tell you that as tight as that, is my hold over my husband—as endless as this circle is my power and my influence, and before I yield one iota of it to Mr. Bathurst, Mark’s heart shall be wrung till I have him at my feet!—

there! now you know what it is to see a woman married to a man she despises!—for his goodness and his high principles, perhaps I could *once* have loved Mark Chetwode, but now—for his pitiful weakness of character and his abject subjection to the will of every mind superior to his own,—Georgina, I despise him!”

Georgy was shocked, silent, and subdued; she had always known that her sister was violent, but this sudden defiance of all control, this passionate display of so much bitterness towards one who had been kind, generous, and indulgent to her beyond the ordinary results of affection, wounded her to the heart, and made her dread to look upon the future, for how was it to end?

Almost everyone asked this question except the one most concerned in its answer. Theresa alone seemed reckless, and it was this very recklessness, that had hitherto restrained Bathurst from making the appeal to her better nature which he thought his long spell of

friendship authorised ; it was this that had made him feel as though a leaden weight were on his tongue, and checked and chilled every syllable by which he would otherwise have endeavoured to impress upon Theresa that she was breaking the truest, fondest heart that ever beat with life.

So passed the days, and at last Bathurst began to suspect that Chetwode gave his wife credit for more feeling than she was really capable of;—he saw she no longer loved her husband, (supposing that she had *ever* done so,) but he at the same time believed her so incapable of any deep or strong attachment, that his mind was gradually relieving itself of a most painful weight of dread and anxiety—
anxiety for the peace of mind of his friend, and dread lest his honour might some day fall into the same pit that had engulfed his happiness.

On this score, Bathurst had now nearly satisfied himself; he felt as if he might now leave Seaton with safety, and it only remained

for him to exhort Chetwode to relax in no degree from his laudable endeavours to amuse the mind of Theresa, and gain some control over it; he would just tell his friend how far he could judge of the character with which they had to deal, and then go, trusting that the devoted affection, if tempered by firmness, might in time reap its own reward.

“You must not leave her too much to her own thoughts,” he would say, “that might prove as pernicious and dangerous as the too great indulgence of her own way;—be close to her constantly—be ever ready as her companion and her friend, and if you then find that habit has made your presence necessary to her, the corner will be turned, and I shall leave your cause in your own hands with every hope that ere long you will have conquered.”

One fact has not been mentioned, whilst we have been dwelling on what was passing in the breast of that ardent friend;—it has not been told that, whilst these plans for the future were

spreading themselves out before him, he was perfectly aware that he whose presence had acted so like poison round about that household hearth was now far removed from the scene of danger; Sydenham had again gone abroad; he had started with the intention of making a protracted tour in the East, and on this, his happy and well-timed absence, Bathurst built his most sanguine hopes.

He knew Sydenham slightly;—he knew him well enough to have a good, even a high opinion of him, and he trusted that this departure was to be attributed to the young man's having seen his danger, and courageously avoided it.

Affairs were in this state, when the period of Bathurst's return to town approached; the day itself was very near, when one morning betimes, the brightness of a November sun, tempted him out before breakfast, and he found himself taking a brisk walk through the Seaton woods with three companions, two of whom were enough to keep the wintry air itself, alive and warm with their ringing laughter. The third

was our old acquaintance Mary Vere, of whom little has been said since objects of greater interest have engrossed attention.

Grown too love-sick and too 'stoopid' for Mrs. Bellingham's taste, that lady had bethought herself that the situation of governess to Lady Rydal's little girls would be far better for her companion than a life devoted to her own reflections. Teaching the 'young idea to shoot' might divert her thoughts, and lead her mind into other channels; so here lived Mary Vere, happily and contentedly, at Ringmere, kindly treated, warmly sympathised with, and quietly existing in the blissful hope that she might some day have saved a small subsistence, and thus rendered herself worthy to be again sought by her lawyer's clerk.

The atmosphere was fresh and clear; the woods were so thinned, that through the leafless boughs could be seen the river glittering in the winter's sun, and its red banks rising on the opposite side.

On walked the quartett, and Mr. Bathurst

was just about to take leave of them at the stile which led into the Ringmere fields, when Mary Vere hurriedly advanced, and expedited the transit of one little pupil over the bars, whilst she begged the eldest to run on before, and not to be afraid of the cows.

"I hurry them," said she, turning to Bathurst, "because I am fearful lest Mrs. Chetwode should think we watch her—we so often encounter her in her morning walk, reading her letters, and no one likes to have their privacy infringed—we are but trespassers, but I keep out of the way the moment I see her dress through the trees;—she is coming now—adieu."

Bathurst glanced hastily in the direction of Mary Vere's eyes, and saw the flutter of draperies, approaching by the river walk.

It was Theresa, and instinctively shrinking back into the wood, he watched her movements.

In her hand was a packet of letters—he could see that two had black seals, as had also the one she was reading, and as she came near

the rustic bridge which crossed the river, and led to the opposite bank, he saw her from time to time raise her handkerchief to her eyes.

Tears?—could those eyes shed tears?—was there softness enough in that still, frigid nature for woman's tears?

Various imaginings sprang to life, as Bathurst watched the light figure gradually walking slower and slower as she advanced to cross the bridge. From whom could that powerful letter have proceeded!—Could it be one of remonstancance from her mother!—alas—hers was no mother qualified to give advice, which would wring tears from her daughter's eyes.—Could it be one of Georgina's warm appeals!—no—Bathurst knew how often they had been made, and how ungratefully they had been again and again received.

She crossed the bridge she gained the opposite side—and still he watched her.

Over and over, that letter seemed to be read, and thicker and faster the tears seemed to fall and require wiping away, when suddenly

she refolded it, placed it with the rest in her bosom, and folding her shawl tightly round her, pursued her way with so rapid a step that as he watched, she disappeared as if by magic.

He followed ;—he crossed the bridge himself, and trod in her very steps, almost without knowing it ; it seemed but the natural continuation of his thoughts to do so, and with his eyes fixed on the ground, he began tracing in the damp, red earth, the print of her feet, when suddenly before him in the pathway, a letter arrested his attention, lying half open upon the ground.

To take it up—to glance at the black seal—to look at the bold, large handwriting, and to be convinced that it was one of those which were in Theresa's hand as she passed, unconsciously, so close to him—was the work of an instant, and a new light gleamed upon him.

The hand that had traced the words, " Mrs. Chetwode, Seaton, Dorchester," was no woman's. The seal too was unfeminine, and examining the engraving on it, truth flashed unanswerably

upon him;—the engraving was a crest, and beneath it were the initials, E. S.

Bathurst was a man who took up even trifles warmly; he was cool and temperate in judgment, but his feelings were quick and deep; and it is doubtful whether any one of the interested relatives, surrounding Theresa, would have felt at that moment a greater shock and a greater pang, than he experienced, when the conviction burst on him that he had thus accidentally discovered a clandestine correspondence.

“If it is so,” was his first hasty and agitated thought, “she is lost! I thought the chain was broken, but if letters pass, I have no hope and Chetwode has no hold.”

He never looked but once again at that letter, and then it was at the post-mark—“Dorchester, Oct. 25th.”—he knew Sydenham had left the neighbourhood, the end of October—this, then, was the first letter. In her hand had he not seen many more? could Chetwode, day after day, have placed them before her

himself, and never remarked the same bold writing!—the same black seal! were his senses so dull as this! or was he so devoid of common curiosity, as day by day to produce, from the letter-bag, letters for his wife, which he neither examined, nor glanced at, nor troubled himself with enquiries as to whence and from whom they came!

He quickened his pace, and gained the house.

“I will give it to her myself when we are alone—one look at her face will satisfy me—and then I will go.”

Chetwode was sitting in the breakfast-room; reading the papers, by himself, when his friend entered, and merely looked up with his faint, melancholy smile.

“Are the letters come?—is the post in?” asked Bathurst, thus preparing the way for a question involving deep interest.

“Long ago,” said Chetwode; “four for you—on your plate; two men I know, dead. You remember Cornwall?”

“ Quite well ; you bought his horses.”

“ True ;—dead, poor fellow ;—broken up since the smash, I suppose ! and Mowbray—you did not know him.

There was a pause, for Bathurst was opening his letters.

Whenever we have anything particular to say, any question to ask, which we imagine requires peculiar circumlocution, how carefully we perform any little trifling acts, the omission of which would—so we fancy—excite remark, and render the question and the words which we meant to be spoken “ quite by chance ’ full of point, and brim-full of deeper meaning than met the ear.

From this delusive feeling Bathurst was not exempt. He would not have gone on speaking without first opening his four letters for the world, but he could not read them.

“ What time does your post come in ?” he at last enquired.

Chetwode looked up vacantly ; he had been reading something interesting, and required a

moment to recal his thoughts, but Bathurst, with a guilty conscience, fancied he detected alarm and suspicion in the look.

“Our post?—London post?—oh, very early, I believe; about eight, I should think; I am sometimes down before nine, but the letters are always here.”

“Ha! then you have not a post-bag—that bore of all country houses.”

“Oh yes, I have—there is one, I know, for I had the key once, but now I let Victor keep it—Theresa is an early riser—much earlier than I am, and did not like waiting till I was up; then we have another post from the country—cross post, they call it—that comes in on Mondays too—you who are a scholar, Bathurst, suppose you write an essay on posts.”

“About as easy as one on tides,” was the reply, but the question was asked—the information was gained; Bathurst’s mind was satisfied on the point which had troubled it, and but one enquiry more remained; that one, he could

not make, but it was, "since what period has Mrs. Chetwode required the key of the letter bag to be in charge of Victor?"

The entrance of Theresa cut short these musings, and the last subject of conversation seemed entirely to have vanished from Chetwode's mind.

On the face of Theresa—that face that Bathurst's own eyes had seen streaming with tears one hour before—there was now no trace even of emotion, her manner to himself was as calm and distant as ever; that to her husband was as cool and imperious, and the countenance of Mark, on the entrance of his wife, had fallen as usual into the expression of sad and hopeless dejection which now characterized it.

"This shall not last!" exclaimed Bathurst at last, inwardly, "some desperate move shall be made, even if I make it myself! this heartless woman shall not with impunity make him wretched, and fancy that when it suits her own convenience, and not till then, she may pro-

claim his disgrace ! on the brink of the precipice, all three shall be arrested !”

By the time that silent breakfast had concluded, a new plan had struck Bathurst, and he acted on it, convinced that he was justified in the deed he contemplated. He had once thought of restoring that letter to Theresa, and watching her countenance as she received it, but he had thought differently of it--a better idea occurred to him, and instead of Theresa, he sought her husband.

“ Chetwode, my good fellow--I have a favor to ask of you--two favors indeed ; one is, that you will write a few lines on this sheet of paper for me, and the other, that you will neither ask me any questions, nor betray to any soul the confidence I am reposing in you.”

Chetwode promised ; he was in that state that he hardly cared what he did ; he suffered himself to be dictated to, and he seemed unequal to the slightest exertion, of either mind or body.

“I am leaving you to-morrow,” continued Bathurst, “and I wish to repose in your charge a paper ; oblige me by writing in this envelope the date on which I give it to you, and direct it outside to myself—thank you—now seal it with your own seal, and keep it till I require it at your hands—keep it in a safe place, because it is of consequence, and now, my dear Chetwode, my early and my best friend, assure yourself that though absent from you, my whole interest shall always be yours, and my whole energies devoted to your service ; I leave you with grieved feelings of the deepest anxiety,” he added, wringing Chetwode’s trembling hand, “but my presence is unnecessary ; all I wish you to remember is, that if ever I can be of use to you, I will serve you, with life itself !”

CHAPTER XIV.

A year has passed since last we left the Chetwodes; one long year, partly spent in visits to Town and a visit to Paris, whilst Seaton still remained the head quarters; but in spite of this occasional variety, the life of Mark Chetwode and his wife had been, to themselves, one of mournful monotony, relieved only—if such a term may be so applied—by the gradual widening of the breach that separated them, heart from heart. That they lived unhappily together, was now no secret; these things soon get whispered about, and those who make it the study of their lives to conceal from the world the “skeleton in the cupboard,” little think that brick and mortar are not proof against the

piercing eye of that same world; that the dearest secrets are dragged forth into the broad daylight, and all one's hidden motives sought after and sifted in spite of all care and all caution.

Not that the Chetwodes were cautious; Theresa had grown more and more reckless as each season came round, and it was now universally known that her husband lived a life of utter and entire subjection. He knew it himself—he felt that he was “fallen from his high estate,” and his whole and only wish was, to shrink as much as possible out of sight, and leave the field to her who had so manfully fought for, and taken possession of it.

Arguments, the arguments of his family and friends, were used in vain; to his wife, none ventured to appeal, for she was held in dread, from the increasing violence of her temper, and the despotism of her character; but till Mark silenced them all by entreating that no one would interfere, the family meetings, family discussions, and family exhortations,

were long and frequent, and as he was generally present at them, it was not likely that he should be ignorant of the position he occupied in society, and of the opinion of the world upon it. Once, Bathurst had stepped in with his advice, and for once, his friend had tried to follow it, but this courageous essay was never repeated, for it met with a reception which effectually prevented any return to the subject.

Bathurst had said, "Dismiss that foreigner; you distrust him—you dislike him, and yet you suffer him to retain his place and its manifold assumptions; dismiss him before you have some cause to regret not having done so at the first," and Mark tried to act upon the advice. Yes—he tried—he struggled hard, but it would not do; in vain he reminded Theresa, when she energetically taunted him with wishing to turn a helpless foreigner, homeless on the world, that she had positively assured him, before their marriage, that when his services were no longer required, Mrs. Dering would, with pleasure, take him back; in vain he affirmed that as far

as he himself was concerned, the services of a man in his capacity were now superfluous;—Theresa was obstinately firm about keeping him—Chetwode was compelled to relinquish the point, for the sake of peace—and Bathurst shrugged his shoulders with contemptuous resignation, when he became convinced, beyond a doubt, that his friend durst no more be master in his own house, than he durst say, except in confidence, that his soul was his own!

There was but one faint ray that illumined the gathering misery of Mark Chetwode during all these months, and that was, that he whose presence had poisoned his peace, and drawn that young wife into the display of levity which had shocked so many, was absent; he was not there to triumph at the fruitful growth of the seed he had sown, and no one in society had now a syllable to say against the conduct of Theresa.

But whilst Chetwode, drowning, grasped at this straw, as a promise of better days, Bathurst only saw in it, a new proof of the dan-

ger of the sunken rock. He saw by this, that she was not a common coquette—not an indiscriminate flirt—and therefore he considered her position as all the more fearful and critical.

He was right—and we must hurry on—but we need not anticipate.

It was autumn, and in consequence of a severe cold, long neglected, Theresa was in Town under the care of an eminent medical man. Once more, the bijou of a house in Curzon Street was occupied by them, and a dingy apartment on the shady side of Queen Street, May Fair, had the distinguished honour of housing Mrs. Dering; she had succeeded, by some unknown process, in getting some friends, who never wintered in London, to allow her to live in their two dining-rooms during the stay of her daughter in Town, because, strange to say, that daughter had not held out the very smallest hope that any invitation was about to emanate from Curzon Street.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Dering came into dinner

very often, and there was always a cover laid for her, so a third place at table never surprised Chetwode—on the contrary, affairs had come to that pitch, that he rather courted, than otherwise, the relief of a third person, to break that painful silence to which we have before alluded, and which had now indeed overtaken the married pair.

One evening, Chetwode returned home rather later than usual; he looked into the dining-room, according to his custom, as he passed the door, and the fire flashed on four places instead of the usual three. He ascended to his dressing-room, intending to ask Theresa, who was expected to dinner, but waiting first to take off his wet boots, he just missed her, and had no opportunity of asking his question, until he descended, dressed, to the drawing-room.

Before the fire, with her feet on the fender, sat a beautiful statue, for the head neither turned, nor did the eyes move as the husband,

who had been absent all day, entered the room. She never greeted him now ; she only answered when he spoke.

“ I saw four places laid for dinner,” were his first words, “ who is coming besides your mother ? ”

“ Mamma is not coming to-day—it is Mrs. Templar—I think I mentioned to you either yesterday, or the day before, that she and I were going to the Howards’ private theatricals to-night.”

Those who have followed the fortunes of these pages, may perhaps see in these two sentences, one great change that Time has wrought ; they may perhaps see that no endearing epithets are now lavished on the cold and distant wife, from the almost timid lips of the once adoring husband ; we say, *almost timid*, because Chetwode always spoke now with a sort of hesitation, as if he did not know but what one or other of his words might prove the spark to ignite the powder magazine.

At Theresa’s answer, he glanced at her dress

and saw that she was *en grande toilette*; the fair round shoulders, dimpling out of dark draperies of velvet, looked snowy even by the pearls that were wound, in one thick coil, about her throat; the soft white arms were bared, almost to the shoulder, and, lovely as she looked, Chetwode, independently of his anxiety for her health, disliked the display; he would have given worlds at that moment to have been on such terms with his wife, as to have felt he could boldly rise, and, taking the costly crimson shawl which hung over the back of her chair, protected from the cold night air, those pure and faultless arms—those beautiful and child-like shoulders—but he did not dare—he saw she was in full dress, and he supposed the taste of her *modiste* was indisputable.

Whilst these rambling reflections flitted through his brain, the noisy wheels of a cab rattled up to the door;—there is no mistaking the peculiarly independent jerk, and jolt, and bang, with which that piece of public property stops at its destination, unless, as is generally

the case, it draws up at the wrong door, and then those who are awaiting the occupant, are additionally edified by hearing a voice from the interior, shouting out the right number with extempore lingual embellishments.

Mark Chetwode heard the strange sounds, and marvelled—

“A street cab—pray who dines here besides Mrs. Templar?”

“An old friend of mine—one whom I have not seen for many months—I met him to-day by accident, and found he had an invitation to the Howards’ as well as——”

There was no time for more—the hasty opening of the door interrupted the sentence, and before the shock could be in any way broken, Sydenham was in the room.

Another moment and the muffled roll of a carriage stopped—Mrs. Templar was announced—then followed dinner, and as Chetwode handed his gay and dressy guest downstairs, he heard the low words, “I ordered mine precisely at ten,” breathed in a half whisper, behind him.

No wonder the conversation during that wretched dinner was carried on by three, instead of four!—no wonder the host sat in gloomy silence at the board which their heedless mirth made festive!—Tortured, how could *he* speak?—heart-wrung, how was it possible for *him* to smile?—He could not!—an accusing voice was ringing in his ear, and for all that he was suffering, who had he, but himself, to blame?—had he not left that young wife to guide and guard herself?—to go, night after night, to party after party, and could he now start up and upbraid her for having openly, and under his very eyes, chosen an escort to fill the place he had himself so culpably vacated?—and yet, that she should choose *that* one of all the world!—that the wanderer should have returned just at this fatal time, when, perhaps incensed at such total neglect, and justly indignant at his daily-increasing estrangement, she, whom a little more kindness and affection might have won back in time, would be more keenly alive than ever to the attention

and admiration which might be lavished on the wounded heart.

And thus he viewed her conduct!--thus he found excuses for her levity, and blinded himself to the effrontery, which, in a calmer moment, he would instantly have recognised as bravado.

She was daring him to the utmost, and he did not know it; she was agonising him, but he fancied he was suffering the anguish of self-reproach, and when, at ten o'clock, the trio took their departure in, apparently, joyous spirits, he sank into a chair hardly capable of bearing to be alone even with his thoughts.

Oh, that he could have followed her!--that he could have had the satisfaction of feeling, that at the gay party where she was shining, he also, in the course of the evening, would be expected to join, and accompany her home!--but it was not so; he knew that his appearance would excite nothing but surprise; he had long since given up accompanying Theresa into society, partly from idleness, and sometimes because

the many friends who were always ready to escort her, rendered the exertion unnecessary. The ill effects of this system were now visible, but it was too late to retrieve the error, and he had but to bear an evil which his own conduct had originated.

Why did not Mark Chetwode, in that first dangerous hour, rise superior to the dread of the world's smile or the world's sneer, and follow the urging impulse within him, which pointed to the path he ought to take?—why, when one would suppose he had already had sufficient experience of the frail ground on which he stood, did he not start up to life and energy, and with the master-hand of a husband's will and power, seize the helm, and at least endeavour, to guide the veering bark into smooth waters again?

He was afraid!—alas, that there should be no other word but that!—he was afraid that on this evening of all others, if he made an unexpected entry into the brilliant circle where his wife was enjoying herself, smiles would

greet him from those who knew he "*never went out,*" and sneers would be his portion from her, who would naturally infer that the unprecedented act was caused by that contemptible passion, jealousy!—As yet, Mark Chetwode, despite his secret wretchedness, could not bring himself to exhibit in public in the new character of a jealous husband—the thought was too degrading,—and so, on that luckless evening, he lost a point in the sad game he was playing, solely by that weak sensitiveness to the remarks of the world, which was the origin of the ruin of his happiness.

No Bathurst was near him now to aid his wavering judgment; that active friend was not even within reach at the critical moment, to say to him,

"Go to this party; your name is of course included in the invitations addressed to your wife;—go and show yourself superior to the opinion of three people out of three hundred, and re-assert your rightful position as guardian

and protector to one who requires your utmost vigilance."

Thus would Bathurst have spoken had he been near; Theresa once accused him of working in the dark,--of working underground, though the effects came out in daylight,—but such was not his plan; if it appeared so, it was the fault of Chetwode, who had not moral courage at least to say,

"I consulted Bathurst, and he coincides with me."

The time was come in which he was afraid to confess that he often applied to Bathurst for advice; and now, secure in the consciousness that her Cerberus was at St Leonard's, safe in attendance on a dying mother, Theresa took the upper hand in high style, and conducted herself exactly as she pleased.

At the close of the evening, when crowds were thronging the supper room, Mrs. Templar found herself near Theresa, who, sitting in a corner with a vacant chair beside her, on

which she had placed her handkerchief and her bouquet, was waiting the return of Sydenham, who was gone in quest of cold chicken.

"I was dying to say a word to you," whispered the pretty widow, stooping down—"how well our dinner went off!"

Theresa smiled triumphantly.

"I was very nervous," continued Mrs. Templar, "for I suspect I arrived just a moment after *he* did?"

"Exactly," said Theresa, "I had not even had time to name my strange guest."

"What good fortune!—and yet—did you not think he was very grave at dinner?—are you sure there will be no explosion on your return?"

"Poor good man!—he will be asleep."

"To-morrow morning then?"

"Not he!—*he is too well trained*—will you move one little inch, and let Captain Sydenham give me some sustenance after all the fatigues?"

Mrs. Templar took the hint, and moved

quite away. It was then about one o'clock in the morning—when two struck, Theresa and her companion were still seated in their corner, and only rose when the ringing sounds of a new valse, reminded them that they were to dance together, and they ascended the staircase, her arm through his.

“This is like old times, Edward,” were her low words, and the answer was the warm and sudden pressure of her hand.

“What a serious flirtation,” said some one to Mrs. Howard, as they made their way to the circle of dancers; and the hostess raised her eyebrows, and shook her head as she turned away.

It was five o'clock in the morning when Theresa reached her home, and though, the next day, she did not descend till twelve, Mark had waited breakfast for her. He spoke of the party of the night before—asked if the theatricals had been good—and wondered he had not heard her come home, but of the guest of his dinner table, he said not one

word;—Theresa was right—*he was too well trained!*

Thus began the winter; this was the beginning of Theresa's new career; applauded by Mrs. Templar, incensed by Mrs. Bellingham, and goaded by Madame D'Esterville, she rushed on, and listened neither to the voice of her own conscience, nor the gentle remonstrances of her sister, who, strange to say, appeared to be the only one of her immediate family, cognizant of her misconduct, and aware of what people were whispering about.

Yet Georgina could but write these remonstrances; she was not on the spot to give her words their full force; therefore, when Theresa received a "lecture-letter," as she called it, she merely glanced over it, and then put it away, to be read thoroughly, whenever she had time.

The winter passed;—to Mark Chetwode it dragged its length along in weary hours, days, and weeks, but to his wife, it flew.

Spring came; spring, lovely, even in Lon.

don, and Theresa's engagements multiplied; she was asked everywhere, she went everywhere, and sometimes Chetwode did not even know where she dined, yet no rumours of her imprudent and frivolous behaviour reached him, until the return of Bathurst to Town, and then gleams of light began to illumine his darkness.

Bathurst had lost his mother, and did not go into society at all, but whenever Chetwode found that his wife did not dine at home, he called for his friend, and they shared a *tête à-tête* repast.

On several of these occasions, as soon as the clock had struck ten, Bathurst would rise and say, "Perhaps I had better be going, for Mrs. Chetwode. will be back soon, I suppose?" and then Mark had to confess that he did not know what her engagements were, and that she might possibly have more than one for the evening —

"If I thought that," said Bathurst on a particular evening, when the spirits of his

friend were lower than usual—I would stay with you another hour.”

“We can soon find out,” was Chetwode’s answer, and he rang the bell. Victor answered it, and Victor knew exactly where Madame was going;—he knew how many parties she was engaged to join, and he knew the hour she intended returning.

“He knows more than I,” said Chetwode dejectedly, and a long and painful pause ensued.

Bathurst bore it for some time, and at last he could refrain no longer; all his smothered forbearance burst forth, when this climax was put to the insignificance of the master of the house, and he solemnly and vehemently exhorted Mark to play so contemptible a part no longer, but by some bold and decided stroke, to put an end to it.”

“Since I have been in Town,” said he, “I have been but little out, it is true, but I have a large circle of friends, and I have heard a great deal which I am most reluctant to impart to you,

and yet it must be done; you shut yourself up, you hear and see nothing—you do not know that the name of Chetwode is ringing from mouth to mouth in conjunction with that of one whom I need not name;—a year ago I warned you, that if there were but the faintest chance of their meeting again, it was your duty instantly to remove her from the dangerous atmosphere, and you have neglected my warning.”

Bathurst stopped, for whilst he had been speaking, Chetwode, who had been sitting with his elbows on his knees, gazing on vacancy, suddenly covered his face with his hands;—at the pause however, he looked up—

“Go on,” said he, “I can bear more—go on—my heart is not yet quite broken.”

“It shall not break, my good friend—it must not, if I can help it,” exclaimed Bathurst warmly, “but I must go on, if only to save you;—remember that in all I say, I only speak of *danger*, not of blame—I only caution you as to the opinion of the world, where appearances

are so wantonly outraged as in the present case;—your wife is still a mere child in years—she is beautiful—she is fascinating—she is associated day by day, and night after night,—at the opera, at the theatres—at dinners, balls, and parties—with one who has been attached to her from childhood, and whose fondest hope was once—to make her his wife—Chetwode, you know all this?”

“God help me,” groaned the wretched man, “why ask the question?—what good can that do?”

“You knew it—you know it—yet you take no steps to arrest the evil, and to dismiss from your service one who is the constant medium of written communications between them——”

“Stop!” interrupted Chetwode, “you run on—you give me no time to think—the cloud is about to burst over me, and my brain seems positively reeling—but,” he added, rising at last from his seat, and almost staggering to the window for air, “I do not—I *will* not believe

what you say!—she cannot be so base—so lost——”

“ Not lost—yet you move no muscle to save her.”

“ How can I?—how can *I*, who have never yet addressed a syllable to her on the subject, begin now ?”

Bathurst sighed deeply. *There* was the root of the mischief; *there* shone out the effects of love of peace and a quiet life !”

“ You can dismiss that man—he is aiding and abetting a course of folly which will lead to worse ; you can forbid your wife to pursue any longer a career which is drawing her into a gulf from which, very soon, innocent as she now is, she will not be able to extricate herself—you can leave London if you choose, and I wish from my soul that I did not doubt, whether your moral strength is equal to the effort !”

For some moments Chetwode was silent—his hands were clasped on his forehead till each finger looked white, from the force with which

they were clenched, one within the other—and then he repeated,

“Had I but spoken before—earlier—the task would have been comparatively easy; but now—”

“Oh, Chetwode,” exclaimed his friend; “a year ago, I touched on this very subject, much more gently than I have done to-night, and your agony seemed greater then than it does now; you cannot, surely, have grown callous?”

“It *seemed*—yes—I showed more—I felt less, perhaps; but do not think that your warning words are lost upon me. I am quite aware of the state of affairs, and of my own position; I am quite prepared to take the most extreme steps, the moment I see any real necessity—otherwise than this, I cannot act. I thank you for your zeal, but the course you advise—the dismissal of Victor—would entail upon me an amount of discomfort, against which I confess I am very ill able to combat; as to the correspondence to which you allude—I do

not doubt your veracity, but I cannot help thinking you must have been misinformed."

"Very well," said Bathurst, provoked at what he thought the impenetrable obstinacy of the infatuated husband; "think so, then—I have done my duty, and I will from henceforth abstain from all interference."

"If you had watched Theresa as narrowly as I have, you would have witnessed the many little traits of keen feeling and high principle which she has constantly exhibited, when the duty of wives has been a subject of conversation. It is this, Bathurst, that makes me more than *think* you are mistaken, or misinformed; I own her conduct is too unguarded, but as I have never yet censured her for levity, it seems to me rather late to begin."

This was the *refrain* with which Chetwode concluded all his arguments, and it put his friend completely out of patience. Bathurst was so firm, so energetic, and so prompt, that the weak points in Mark's character quite exasperated him.

It was some moments before he could trust himself to speak, and they were spent in pacing the room, like a tiger in his den ; but he had cooled down a little when he resumed the broken thread.

“ Very well—take your own way ; from the hour of your marriage, you have bent before an indomitable will, and now you cannot rise again ; I see it all too clearly, alas, and I see too, that nothing I can urge is strong enough to rouse you from this unhappy lethargy of subjection. You began your career as a married man by yielding on every possible point—the points might then have been trifles, such as journeys, horses, servants, the colour of a carriage, and the purchase of a country house,—they have increased in magnitude since then, and now, I do not conceal from you that I look on your position as fearful. I never thought it could come to this, and I wish I could save you, but you will not suffer me.”

The parting that night between Bathurst and Chetwode was abrupt ; they did not even

shake hands, for each was so deeply engrossed with his own thoughts, that those small acts of conventional courtesy were completely overlooked.

Bathurst took his hat, rolled a scarf round his neck, left his gloves on the table, and let himself out of the house. An hour afterwards, when he must have been in his lodgings, and probably in bed, Chetwode rung the bell, and said to Victor,

“The door, for Mr. Bathurst.”

CHAPTER XV.

It was some days before these two consulting friends met again, and then the subject was not renewed between them; it seemed as if by tacit consent, both avoided it, yet Chetwode was neither so lethargic nor so callous, as Bathurst thought; he was watching the progress of affairs with the keenest of all eyes, inwardly determined to sacrifice even the 'peace and quiet' he so prized, the moment there was real necessity. Bathurst had blamed him for waiting for that necessity; he said it was as absurd as crying out after one was hurt. But 'the Ethiop cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots,' so Mark Chetwode's nature underwent no miraculous transformation. Slowly, steadily, and, as he feared, *surely*, he was 'biding his time.'

The Keatings were now expected in Town for their two months of gaiety. The opera-box, which the sisters were again to share together, was engaged; Mrs. Dering having taken her seventy-francs-worth out of her landlady in Paris, had fluttered over to the metropolis again, and was inhabiting an apartment in Clarges-street—having received no invitations, strange to say, to either Hill-street, Curzon-street, nor Coulson's-hotel, where the Keatings were to be located—when events, startling and sudden, seemed all at once to hurry on the destiny of the two divided Chetwodea.

That Chetwode's mind was calm, in the midst of such an ordeal as that through which he was passing, is not to be supposed possible, and yet no one knew the inward anguish he was suffering. Even Theresa thought he was getting accustomed to the life it pleased her to lead, and as he was not in the circles where rumours about herself were rife, she grew more and more unguarded in her conduct. When some freak was about to be played—some

water-party to Richmond, or railway expedition to Greenwich or Blackwall—undertaken by the gay and reckless set who had gladly enlisted the beautiful young wife in their band—Mrs. Templar would sometimes whisper, “Suppose Mr. Chetwode were to pounce down upon us, just now!” and then the laugh of defiance, and the scornful words of indifference as to whether he did or not, proved to all, that the absent husband was a cipher—very powerful, as far as signing bankers’-cheques went, but beyond that act of independence, hand-cuffed and tongue-tied.

One morning—it was the day but one before the Keatings were to arrive in Town—Mark, who had left the house as usual, immediately after breakfast, intending to go to his chambers, felt himself so completely unhinged by a violent head-ache, that he resolved to return home and remain quiet till the evening, when, for a wonder, he and his wife were to dine at the same house.

He had a key of the house door, and therefore admitted himself. As he entered the hall, he saw Victor standing on the stairs, listening to some directions which Theresa was giving him, from an upper landing: the former no sooner saw his master appear than he ascended the stairs, and the drawing-room door was abruptly closed.

Mark took no notice of this; he placed his hat in silence on the hall table, but in doing so another attracted his attention. Instinctive curiosity led him to look within, for he thought it might be that of a visitor, but he found it belonged to Victor, and as he was turning away to enter his study his eye suddenly caught sight of a note, lying in the crown of the hat, and half concealed by a pair of gloves. In that one momentary glance, letters forming the name of Sydenham, had stamped themselves on his vision, and recoiling, as if from something venomous, he retreated into his room, and shut the door.

Seated there, in all his loneliness, Bathurst's

words,* warnings, and assertions, came back and confronted him like accusing witnesses; and he almost cowered down before their overwhelming truth.

It must here be remembered that Chetwode was not a man of the world; he was not one who had served an apprenticeship with its ways, and learnt to look upon circumstances like those we have been describing, with a lenient, or an indifferent eye. He had trained himself in a severe school—he had fed himself upon principles all the more strict, because they were accounted strict in an age when they seem to grow, daily, more and more lax. He had from his youth upwards drawn in his mind's eye, the picture of what he considered feminine perfection, and he had formed, for a wife, a model after his own heart; in marrying Theresa Dering, he fully and firmly believed that he had found his original—that he was another Pygmalion, and that the pure and faultless statue of his day-dream was, in her lovely person, animated into life.

From what an eminence was he now doomed to fall! one who had built his ideas on less exalted ground would have felt no shock, comparatively, on discovering that human nature was frail; but Mark Chetwode thought all were frail and false, and liable to err, *except Theresa*—and now, the deceptive spell was broken; that note, innocent as its contents might be, was a crime in his sight; the very fact of its having been written at all, was an evidence of guilt.

Theresa had once called him ‘a prude,’ and ‘old maidish’ in his sentiments; if, in thus mercilessly ridiculing the sensitive points in his character, she had even a shadow of foundation for the accusation, she would have acted more wisely had she respected, humoured, or at all events, tolerated them; but instead of that, her system had been one of ridicule, defiance, and finally—outrage.

With every pulse throbbing violently, Mark Chetwode sat there, alone in his room, pondering as to what he should do. The house

was profoundly still, yet myriads of sounds and voices were ringing and jabbering in his ears; he felt that the crisis was approaching—the crisis that would force him *to speak*—and he felt himself unmanned, even before the trial began.

At first he thought he would go to the drawing-room, and await there the return of the subtle messenger; then he reflected that one so experienced, would know better than to bring the reply into the room, until he had previously ascertained that the coast was clear—supposing his mission were secret—*clandestine*, as Bathurst had so bitterly called it! no—he would not go to the drawing-room—he would wait where he was—where he could see nothing, but where he should hear; again, no! he recollected the stealthy, velvet step of Victor on the staircase at Seaton, and he knew that there in his study he should hear nothing.

How long he remained in this state of distraction, he could not tell; suffice it, that at last, quiescence was intolerable, and he left

his study, and resorted to the dining-room. A newspaper was on the table and he took it up. How could he read? He laid it down, and gazed vacantly out of the window; there were wire-blinds, and he could see the passers-by, hurrying to-and-fro; he thought to himself, perhaps some of them, in their humble homes, might pity him, in the midst of his luxury and wealth, if they knew of the vulture that was gnawing at his heart.

As he thus gazed, a tread, not soft and stealthy, but slow, came pacing along the pavement, and, rooted to the spot, Mark watched the returning messenger as he gradually approached the house.

In the hand of Victor was a superb *bouquet*—a cape jessamine, encircled by crimson geraniums—and he was lost in the occupation of, apparently, examining the centre flower. As he came nearer, Chetwode saw that he was not examining, but separating the centre from the rest, and round the stalks—deep in the foliage—and with consummate skill—those art-

ful fingers were inserting, what looked to Chetwode like a band of paper—another moment and it looked like a note—a moment more—it *was* a note.

Chetwode went quietly up-stairs ; he entered the drawing-room, where Theresa, lounging over the *Morning Post*, received him with widened eyelids of surprise. He seated himself in a chair, opposite to her, and before sufficient time had elapsed for a syllable to be exchanged between the husband and wife, Victor was in the room, the identical *bouquet* in his hand.

Mark watched his wife narrowly—she turned her eyes slowly and carelessly on the flowers ; they were laid beside her, and in a languid, indifferent voice, she asked from whence they came.

“From Madame Jullien’s,” was the answer ; and Victor was dismissed with the acknowledgment of an almost imperceptible movement of the head.

The moment had now arrived.

"Are those a purchase, or a present?" were Chetwode's first words.

"A purchase. I commissioned Victor to get them for me."

"I thought our only engagement for this evening was my mother's dinner?"

"I have still a hope of a voucher for the Academy-ball; but the Hill-street party will be all asleep, long before my gaiety begins."

"Your flowers are very beautiful—worthy a closer inspection I should think."

Theresa looked at him quickly and placed her hand on the *bouquet*.

"Will you allow me to examine them?" he added.

"I should think you could see enough of them from this distance," returned Theresa; "what is there particularly remarkable in a cluster of red geraniums?"

And now Chetwode felt nerved! her composure, her duplicity, and her scornful manner roused his subdued spirit.

"There is a note," said he, fixing on her a

gaze so firm, so unflinching, that even her steady eye quailed, though it did not fall, beneath it—"whether that be remarkable or not, I cannot say, but that those flowers contain a note, I am certain; allow me to examine them, since it appears you are unwilling to do so."

Theresa brushed her hand over the flowers.

"There is no note here," she said, and her lip curled.

"Then it has been abstracted—give me the bouquet."

"No!" she exclaimed with sudden vehemence, and starting from her seat, "never, Mr. Chetwode! what have I done that you should dare to intrude on me with these shameful insinuations?"

"Not shameful—not insinuations?" he said in a sort of strange, calm voice, and a face of which every muscle seemed frozen into rigidity—"look at your feet, Theresa."

The note had fallen on the ground; she had not observed it, but he had; and there it lay,

in silent judgment—in visible and voiceless condemnation.

For more than a minute the eyes of each were bent on the ground, and on the same object—it seemed a question which would move first, till at last Theresa darted forward, seized the note, tore it into a thousand atoms, and with a laugh of the most cutting and triumphant derision, flung the fragments into the air.

That act put the finishing stroke to Chetwode's forced composure—it exasperated him—he was no longer the same man—for it seemed to change his very nature.

A scene, a scene so violent and so painful followed, that the written description of it would but inadequately convey an idea of all that passed; it was a trial of strength between a power that had been long dominant, and one newly sprung to action; the fearful nature of that struggle will be best evinced by the fact, that the latter power conquered; the concentrated wrath, indignation and suffering of

months, burst forth in that hour, and Mark Chetwode left the room, master of the field.

He went down stairs—Theresa stood where he had left her, clasping the edge of the table against which she leant for support—she counted every foot-fall as he descended—she heard him ring the dining-room bell, and she heard Victor answer the summons; listening breathlessly, she, after a time, heard the same well-known step descend, and she knew that Victor had received his dismissal—another moment, the street-door opened, her husband left the house, and she sank into a chair.

In the midst of a paroxysm of tears, passionate tears, wrung from her, more by the unexpected defeat she had experienced, than by any remorse for having roused to just wrath a spirit which had so long, from kind forbearance, lain dormant, Sydenham was announced.

It was his customary hour of calling; he called every afternoon, to compare notes as to the plans of the evening, and thus he found Theresa.

Tears from those eyes! only once before had he ever seen them, and the sight carried him back to that day, and revived in his breast all the tenderness of happy hours; shocked, grieved, and distressed, how warmly did his words of consolation fall on the wounded heart of Theresa; how tender were the tones of that voice, compared with those of the angry husband, still vibrating on every fibre of her frame! It was an unfortunate moment for comparison between the lover and the husband—an unfortunate moment for the visit of the former, for the momentary ascendancy, just gained by the latter, was now completely obliterated.

Yet in all he said, Sydenham was guarded; there was, in his eyes, a halo of purity round Theresa which made him shrink from sullyng her ear by one word breathing aught but the deepest and most affectionate brotherly sympathy; whether his feelings corresponded with his outward expressions of simple interest—whether they partook of the same fraternal character, no observer could tell; in all that he

said, he was careful to a fault, and the task was very hard.

Before him was one whom he had loved from early childhood—one whom he knew had once returned his love. Circumstances which worldly wisdom had controlled, and in which their own feelings had not even been consulted, had parted them, and Sydenham—who had once almost doubted whether Theresa's sentiments for him had not changed in favour of Mr. Chetwode, and induced her, not reluctantly, to become his wife, had now lived to see that the only magnet which had drawn two so dissimilar together, had been gold—that Theresa, unloved and unappreciated, was linked to one utterly unworthy of her—and that she, for whom he would himself have toiled and slaved and thought no sacrifice, to ensure her happiness, too great—was miserable!

No wonder then, that when he tried to soften down the warm words on his lips, and endeavoured to sooth and reconcile her to her fate, with

careful, measured phrases, no wonder that he found the task so hard.

"I am sorry you came just at this unlucky moment," said Theresa at last, dashing away some lingering drops, whilst her other hand still remained clasped within that of her companion, "I cannot bear you to see me so humiliated—to see how I am treated—and how I am obliged to submit."

"Do you think, Theresa, I did not know it? do you think I do not know every expression of your countenance so well, that I have not long seen this!"

"Sometimes I have thought you did; at others I have thought you believed me happy."

"Happy? loved? appreciated, Theresa?"

"I fancied you did not know all—I fancied that my spirits in society—that false excitement into which I have rushed, because I could not bear myself at home—I fancied all this would have deceived you."

"Though we have been surrounded by num-

bers, yet we have somehow lived in a world of our own, have we not? have you never felt this?"

"If I have, it was wrong of me," said Theresa.

Sydenham drew back.

"I only meant," he added, "that it prevented my being deceived."

"But you feel for me?" asked Theresa, "let me hear you say that there is one being in the world who pities me, Edward! though there are not many whose pity would be welcome, still, it would be dreadful to think I had lost all—even you!"

Sydenham walked to the window and back again, before he trusted himself to answer—and then he said,

"From the bottom of my heart—from my soul—I do pity you!"

"And it is to go on—it must go on—for years, years, and years!" said Theresa, in a low, hesitating voice, half choked, yet struggling to be articulate—"think of that! for a

life-time—and we are both young; for my whole life long, I am to live thus—tyrannised over, unloved, and—perhaps, as you said—unappreciated; Edward, I do not think I can bear it; when he left me to-day after that awful scene, I felt my forehead, and looked at my hands, and I thought every vein was going to burst.”

“Hush, hush, my poor Theresa! he was incensed, and naturally so; I had no right to send you a note so imprudently.”

“You! it was not your fault! it was all mine, for telling Victor if you wrote, to buy a bouquet and put the note inside; but what did you say in it? for rather than that he should see it, I tore it into a thousand atoms.”

“I merely said I should be at Mrs. Templar’s at eleven, and walk up and down the street till I saw your carriage turn the corner.”

It had been arranged that a large party were to go to the Academy ball together, and Mrs. Templar was to go with Theresa, escorted as usual by Sydenham. The scene of the morn-

ing, however, had so completely damped the spirits of Theresa that she felt it impossible to keep the engagement, and no persuasions on the part of Sydenham could induce her to alter her determination. She could not do it—she did not feel equal to it, and all he could extort from her was, a promise that she would meet him the following day at the Horticultural Fête at Chiswick, and tell him if anything further had transpired.

That evening she attended neither the Academy ball, nor the dinner party in Hill Street. To the latter Chetwode went alone, and to his mother and sister, after the guests had departed, he communicated two pieces of startling intelligence—the first, that Victor was dismissed from his service, and would leave the following day—the second, that he and his wife were about to return to Seaton, the day after that.

To these pieces of information no reply was made; they were received in sad silence, for

it was no longer a secret, that sooner or later "the house divided against itself, must fall," and Mrs. Chetwode never now saw her son, but what she expected him to inform her of some desperate step to which he had been driven.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE next morning dawned brightly, and Theresa rose unrefreshed and dispirited; she even turned away from the beautiful toilet spread out for her admiration in her dressing-room, and felt more than half inclined to give up going to Chiswick altogether. Then again, she thought it would be such a disappointment to her mother, whom, as a great treat, she had promised to take, that she consented to approve the taste of Athalie, her maid, who was far prouder of the beauty of her young mistress, than that young mistress was herself, and resolved to keep in her room all the morning, and so avoid encountering her husband.

This line of proceeding was very perplexing

to Chetwode, it threw out all his plans; he wished particularly to tell her that he had given orders for everything to be ready for their return to Seaton in two days, and yet she would not admit him to a moment's conference; what to do he hardly knew, and once he thought of writing, only that would look singular in the eyes of the servants. He knew Theresa dined at her friend Mrs. Howard's that evening, for he had heard for the last month that they were to go together to the ball of a foreign Ambassador; thus there was no help for it, but to wait an opportunity; one comfort was, by the rising of another sun, Victor would have left the house.

At three o'clock that afternoon, Theresa started for Chiswick—Mrs. Bellingham's old friend Mr. Cholmondeley, who had lately been paying Mrs. Dering remarkable attention, was the third in the carriage, and Sydenham was waiting for them at the gate as they drove up.

He assisted Theresa to alight—he drew her

arm through his with the air of one who had a right to do so—he led her away without even looking at Mrs. Dering—who was in a state of the most delicate confusion, not knowing whether to pinion Sydenham's other arm, or wait for Mr. Cholmondeley, who was having himself dusted,...and he entered at once upon the subject of their conversation the preceding day with such unusual warmth that Theresa was surprised, and almost shrank from his altered manner.

She could not imagine what had so changed him—she was alarmed, and thought she had gone too far—his manner was now plainly that of a lover, and her mother and Mrs. Templar even, had both so often said, “Retain him only as a friend,” that she thought she must have outstepped the limits of friendship.

And yet—who was such a friend to her as Edward Sydenham? who knew so much of her wretched history, and who entered so deeply into all her misery? no one! no one knew how to console her as he did; no one...it was some

time before she would admit it...but no one in the wide world loved her as he did !

"As he did, once, I mean," said she to her conscience. "So if I were to be cold to him now, it would be the basest ingratitude."

And she was not cold, and the fleeting moments, spent in those pleasant shades, sanctioned in the world's eye by the hovering presence of Mrs. Dering and her venerable admirer, were amongst the happiest Theresa had ever spent.

At last the time arrived, when those who had dinner engagements, sought their carriages to return to town.

"We shall meet at dinner—at the Howards'" —said Theresa, as Sydenham led her towards the gate by which crowds were already making their exit—"and I have a seat for you in the carriage now, if you like."

"The seat - with pleasure ;—but to Mrs. Howard I have sent an excuse ;—we shall meet at the Ambassador's ball."

"Not going to Mrs. Howard's?"

"No," Sydenham spoke nervously and hurriedly—"the reason has been on my lips fifty times to-day, but I could not bring myself to utter it; Theresa, I have so much to say to you, that I know not where, or how, to begin—I have even a letter written for you to read."

"Give it to me," whispered Theresa—"I can read it as soon as I get home."

"And you will give me the answer to-night?"

"Yes—tell me all about it during our drive—Mamma is far too pleased and puzzled at the revival of her youthful days to listen to us."

Just as Sydenham's foot was on the step of the carriage, two ladies rushed up; one was Mrs. Templar.

"Theresa! Theresa! stop one instant! the strangest, the most unfortunate accident has just happened; in the crush, my carriage has been literally smashed; everybody is full, and I cannot get a seat anywhere—we dine at the Howard's, and if you do not take pity on us, I do not know what on earth we are to do.'

Their dilemma was evident, but so was Theresa's annoyance;—her party was of her own choosing, and Mrs. Templar saw that her petition could not have been more ill-timed; however, it was impossible to refuse—Mrs. Templar and her friend were admitted—Mr. Cholmondeley and Sydenham were to find their own way home, and Theresa threw herself back in the carriage, endeavouring to crush into the folds of her dress the letter that had been placed in her hand the moment before. They drove home. Theresa had first to drop Mrs. Templar and then Mrs. Dering, and when she reached her own door, she found she had barely time to dress. On the stairs Athalie met her in despair—her dress had not yet come home!—at the drawing-room door she met her husband—did she want the carriage for half an hour?—he had left some particular papers open on the table at the club, and wished to avail himself of the swiftest mode to remedy the evil.

“Take it by all means,” said Theresa, “and

for mercy's sake call at Madame Dèvy's, and bring my dress with you."

The confusion, the hurry, and the worry, were all so great that Theresa flung off her morning finery, and never for a moment thought of her letter. The jewels she generally wore were all on her toilet table, and to fill up the time and prevent mistakes, she separated the sets, and left out only the superb *parure* of diamonds which had been her husband's wedding gift. Only one ornament amongst that profusion had *not* been presented by him, and that was, an enamelled snake—green and spotted with diamonds—it either wound round the arm, or clasped round the throat with a pendant emerald at the snap. That jewel was very seldom worn by Theresa except on her arm, but that night, without thinking, she hung it round her neck, and Athalie clasped it, imagining she meant to wear it.

Just then the door opened, and the dress for the evening made its appearance.

Now let us follow Mark Chetwode. He had, as we know, availed himself of his wife's carriage. He had gone down to the club, and rescued his papers, and as he drove home, he counted them over. One, of little consequence, was missing, but thinking he saw something like paper under the rug of the carriage, he turned it up and discovered a letter, soiled, trampled on, and in a torn envelope. As he picked it up, the enclosure fell out.

He opened it—the hand was strange to him—there was no address on the envelope, and no signature inside—so he read it.

We know that the blood runs cold—we have heard people say “I felt as if I had been shot,—we are familiar with a thousand phrases expressive of the convulsion of the human frame under circumstances of great grief or terror—but all these sensations would probably fall short of what Mark Chetwode felt, as from word to word and line to line of that fatal letter his horror-struck eyes wandered on, as if bound

by some spell, to read all, and lose not a syllable!

Burning words—epithets of affection, hideously guilty in the sight of Mark Chetwode, because coupled with the name of his wife—his own Theresa—expressions of pity for her hard fate, and deepest, warmest sympathy in all she had suffered, *ever since her marriage*—(what a light to burst on the husband!) such was the tenour of that dreadful document, and worse, worse, worse, was at the end.

“You look with dread, with horror even, on years and years of life with him from whom you receive this bitter treatment, this unmanly persecution;—yet think, my own Theresa, that this is not compulsory, that the misery is not irremediable—you have a refuge in the heart of one whose devotion has never yet wavered, and on whose unfailing love and protection you may eternally rely.

“Fly with me, Theresa—I can offer you a home that our mutual affection will bless, and happiness which perhaps I might once have been unable to give—fly with me, and end the wretched warfare that is destroying you—we shall meet to night—

consider in the meantime all that I have said to you, and if you consent, *wear round your throat the enamelled snake—*"

The handwriting, as has been said, was strange to Mark Chetwode—he could of course *suspect* the writer, but could he on mere suspicion, take the only course which honour pointed out?—dreadful—dreadful;—one fact, however, was indisputable—that guilty document was to *his wife*—of *her* degradation and sin there could be no doubt—his course, with regard to her, was clear enough—as to how he should act towards her, he never for an instant hesitated, and now the carriage stopped at his own door—*his home!* what a home to return to!

The coachman wanted to know if he was to put his horses up?

"No—they will be required in five minutes; after that they will not be wanted again."

Chetwode walked straight up to his wife's door, and was, as usual, refused admittance.

"I am sorry to disturb you," said he, "but I must request you to open the door—my business is urgent, and admits of no delay."

His voice was peremptory—very unlike its usual tone—and he was admitted.

At the long glass, but turned towards him stood that proud and beautiful figure, resplendent in all that could add to such lavish charms. Athalie stood behind her, not interfering with the general effect, but putting some finishing stroke to the elaborate toilet.

"Leave the room, Athalie," said the husband; and the astonished abigail was so thunderstruck at the command, and the absolute manner in which it was delivered, that she instantly obeyed, leaving her mistress rooted to the spot.

"What now?" Theresa asked, as, having watched the attendant out of the room and down the stairs, Chetwode closed and secured, the door—"what, now?"

"Turn to the light," was his only answer

as, advancing to the window, he fixed his eye upon her ; “ you are dressed ? ”

She gave a brief affirmative.

“ Your toilet is completed ? ” he continued, pointedly, whilst his face turned of a still more ashy hue, and there was a sudden trembling of the muscles round the mouth ; “ you wear now what you intend to wear at the houses to which you propose going this night ? you mean to add no ornament, nor to take any one of those gems off ? ”

Theresa's astonishment may be imagined ; she thought he had gone mad ! she gazed in his face, and her lips assayed in vain to frame words : unfortunately these appearances were misconstrued, and Chetwode almost shook with the intensity of conflicting emotions ;—his eyes were rivetted on the enamelled snake round her throat, and the moments seemed hours till she spoke.

“ I am dressed,” she said, still unable to comprehend either his object, or his manner ; “ I intend, of course, to go just as I am ; does

not my toilet please you? in Heaven's name, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," he replied, with desperate calmness; "you have answered my questions, and I am satisfied; I am not here to denounce, to condemn, or even to upbraid you; you know your fault, and you are doubtless prepared to meet its punishment; you know the crime into which, a few hours hence, you would have been led, and from which the husband you have so deeply, so heartlessly injured, has saved you—"

"Mark—"

"All this you know; and as your fault admits neither of defence nor forgiveness, so do I forbid you to say one word in the hope of altering my determination."

"I must—I *will* be heard!" cried Theresa, violently; "I will not stand here and be lectured like a child, and not know of what I am accused—unless, indeed," she added, pausing suddenly, "unless you are still harping on that note of yesterday?"

"No," returned Chetwode, in the same calm, icy tone—"not of the note of yesterday, but of the letter of to-day."

At the utterance of these words, an instantaneous change was wrought in the countenance and bearing of Theresa;—she turned red—then deadly pale—then pressed a hand on each temple as if to recollect herself; and then the truth, in all its awful reality, flashed across her! Sydenham's manner that whole day—the excuse he had sent to the Howards'—the answer she was to give him at the ball—she saw it all now, and clasping her hands over her eyes, she murmured—

"My God! I have betrayed him!"

Mark never uttered a word. A smile—*such* a smile! sat on his features, as he gazed at the drooping figure before him; and terrified far more by his silence, than by anything he could have said, Theresa all at once dropped on her knees.

"Mercy!" she exclaimed, "have mercy, I implore you!"

"Rise," said her husband; "that attitude befits only actresses and heroines; I have been merciful too long, if it is mercy for yourself that you ask; is it for yourself, or him?"

"For both! Mark, on my knees I swear to you...I take Heaven as my witness...I swear to you on my solemn word and honour..."

"Honour?" Chetwode laughed bitterly; "swear by anything else—not that."

"I swear to you, then, by my innocence, that whatever that letter contained, *I never read it!* it was placed in my hand, and I dropped it; but to this moment, I do not know one syllable of its contents."

"Abstain at least from falsehoods," was the answer; "you bear round your throat at this instant, the proof of your guilt."

"What can I say? what can I do?" cried Theresa, and tearing off the ornament, she dashed it on the ground.

"It is too late," continued Chetwode; "I have no time to waste; I had resolved to act without speaking, but you have compelled me

to bandy words with you—never mind—in this world we shall never again exchange a sentence; the carriage is at the door; it is to convey you from this house, no longer your home, to the only roof fit to shelter you—that of the mother who educated you; say nothing, but place over that dress whatever you were about to wear this night; I wish to make no scene, to create no sensation, but I command you, as your husband, to obey me; I shall accompany you myself, and on my arm, *for the last time*, you shall descend these stairs.”

He was obeyed. Hardly feeling the ground beneath her feet, powerless from terror, and absolutely supported by the strong, firm arm, through which her own was passed, Theresa felt herself borne along, placed in the carriage, heard the order given “to Clarges-street,” and was in the presence of her mother, more dead than alive, without having opened her lips since she left Curzon-street.

Mrs. Dering inhabited two apartments on the ground floor of the house where she lodged;

it was on the shady side of the street, and was therefore more sombre than any of the other houses, which is saying a great deal. When the carriage stopped at her door, knowing her daughter's engagements, it never entered into her head that it could be hers, and she therefore went on with an occupation in which she was deeply engrossed, thinking the untimely visit was to some other inhabitant of the house.

Mrs. Dering was making cold cream ;—she had taken off her morning horticultural attire, and was arrayed in a yellowish chintz dressing-gown, the pattern on which was a large, round, black, wafer ; the sleeves were tucked up above her elbows—in one hand she had an ivory spoon, and in the other, a piece of candle, which she had taken out of the solitary candlestick, and with which she was watching a small pipkin, bubbling over a fire, composed of about three coals, collected in the corner of the grate.

Upon this strange figure, engaged in her strange orgies, did Chetwode and his wife

abruptly intrude, and as the cloak dropped from the shoulders of the latter, leaving her standing like some radiant spirit, in the middle of the room, her hands still grasping the arm of her husband for support, but her head bowed on her breast, it was a singular scene, for no one spoke.

Mark was the first to break silence ; in a few brief sentences he told Mrs. Dering the state of the case, and placed her daughter in her charge.

"I bring her back to you," said he, "to you, who made her what she is ; to your pernicious tuition is she indebted for those principles which have been her ruin, and therefore to you do I now restore her ; at the present moment she requires your care—it is no longer my place to bestow on her that attention, in which, God knows, from the hour she married me, I have never failed ; how she has requited me, she best knows herself ;—may He who has said, ' Vengeance is mine,' forgive her for the part she has played—see to her, Mrs. Dering,"

he added quickly, for Theresa's hold of him was relaxing, and her eyes closing, "take care of her—have you no sofa on which I can place her?"

Mrs. Dering's bed was in the adjoining room, and thither she hastily led the way; Mark carried his wife in, and laid her upon it.

"Bring a candle," said he, for the low and dingy room was almost in darkness, and whilst Mrs. Dering flew to obey the request, he stooped and pressed his lips on the cold and senseless brow—it was his last kiss—no eye saw it, and she on whom it was bestowed, did not feel it.

"In an hour," he added, turning to Mrs. Dering as unmoved as she had left him, "I shall be with you again—but remember—*she* is not to appear—my business is solely with yourself—in an hour, I will inform you of my arrangements for the future."

And he left the room. Straight from that door, he proceeded to the lodgings of his friend Bathurst—he was told he was dining at his club, and thither he went. He sent in, and

desired the porter to tell Mr. Bathurst a gentleman wished to speak to him in great haste, and the next moment Bathurst, having apparently just begun his dinner, was at the carriage door. Chetwode made him get in;—in silence they drove back to Curzon-street and the carriage was dismissed for the night.

"Is Victor in the house?" he asked of the man servant who had admitted them.

"No, sir."

"How long has he been gone?"

"About an hour, sir."

Chetwode looked at his friend.

"You can of course guess what has happened?"

"Not the worst that *could* happen, I hope?"

"No—from that I believe I just saved her;—Bathurst, I am alone here now—all but the servants—read that letter, and, when I tell you that I have just left Mrs. Chetwode with her mother—that according to the word I once pledged to you, I have looked on her for the last time,—say if you do not think I have acted

rightly—say, if I could have done otherwise.”

In the manner in which Chetwode had conducted the scene from beginning to end, his friend heartily concurred; the only difficulty now lay, in not knowing the writer of the letter—Bathurst did not see how Mark Chetwode could well go and accuse Sydenham to his face, merely on supposition.

“ I think there is not a doubt,” said Chetwode.

“ You *think*—but you cannot call a man out because you *think* he deserves it.”

“ This night must settle it—I cannot live twelve hours longer in this state,” was the answer, and there was a long pause, broken at last by Bathurst.

“ Do you remember,” said he, “ about a year and a half ago—when I was staying with you at Seaton—my placing in your charge a paper?”

“ Perfectly—it is there in my desk—just as you gave it to me.”

“ What did you think it was?”

"Your will."

"It was a letter, Chetwode—a letter that came into my possession by accident—I picked it up in the river walk at Seaton, and if I am not greatly mistaken you will find the writer of that and this to be one and the same person."

From its hiding-place, where it had lain so long, the letter was withdrawn, and the seal broken;—the handwriting of both, was carefully examined, and when no doubt remained of the identity, Bathurst pointed to the signature of the first—

"EDWARD SYDENHAM."

"Then there is no time to be lost," said Chetwode ringing the bell, "you once said to me that if ever you could be of use to me, you would serve me with life itself—the hour is come."

"And I am ready!" was the answer.

In a few minutes more, Chetwode was alone, and Bathurst had departed on his errand.

As the wretched husband sat there—alone in the twilight of that summer's evening—it

occurred to him that it would be better to write to Mrs. Dering—to give her in plain writing a summary of his wishes regarding his wife—than to risk an interview, on which, if it were Theresa's will to intrude, no one had sufficient power to prevent her.

He therefore began his task, and briefly but simply stated his wishes.

“ I resign into your hands the charge of your daughter. By degrees—if you are not already informed—you will become aware of the reasons which preclude all possibility of my ever being re-united to her ; and yet, in banishing her from my house, I do not wish or mean to deprive her of those luxuries to which, as my wife, she has been accustomed, and which may now be essential to her comfort. She will, therefore, receive from me, from this day, the sum of one thousand pounds a year, to be paid quarterly, and in advance, for her use and benefit, and for her support, as befits one who still bears my name. This sum will be paid

with but one reservation:—if ever you so fail in the charge entrusted to you as to let her out of your sight—if ever you suffer her to see or meet Captain Sydenham again—or in any way, directly or indirectly, to hold any communication with him, or any one connected with him—from that hour, the allowance I have made, as above, shall be stopped, and only the barest pittance which the law can wrest from me, will I advance for her maintenance. I leave it to yourself, to fix on such a residence as may best enable you to run no risk of this kind; and, in conclusion, I only beg you to assure yourself, that, in whatever part of the globe you may eventually reside, I shall find means to ascertain whether my injunctions are obeyed, and my restriction held sacred.”

Oh, Money! How well did Mark Chetwode prove his perfect knowledge of the character of Mrs. Dering, when he tied her hands with golden cords, and bought her prudence with a price.

CHAPTER XVII.

ALL that night, Mrs. Dering sat up by the side of her daughter. Theresa lay in a sort of sleep, from which she did not rouse herself till late on the following day ; and then, from that stupor, she woke to the most violent and uncontrolled grief—almost amounting to frenzy.

At first, she had fancied all that had passed was a frightful dream—a night-mare—but when her senses returned, and looking about, she found where she was—in a dingy, dirty room, untidy, as everything belonging to Mrs. Dering always was ; her own lovely dress, studded with jewels, a sad contrast to all around her...it was indeed a bitter awakening. She then knew that she had had no dream ; all had been fright-

ful reality, and was so still, and as Mrs. Dering listened to her passionate outburst of remorse and repentance, she thought to herself,

“A pretty prospect I have before me.”

As the hours passed, and the unhappy girl became sufficiently collected to reflect on the probable consequences of a scene such as she had gone through the preceding evening, a conviction that some dreadful event had, by that time, happened, threw her again into that state of wild excitement, so trying to her mother, so painful to witness, and so difficult to reason against.

In their silence and solitude, no one had been near them...not even Athalie. Mrs. Dering had questioned the bearer of numberless boxes containing her daughter's wardrobe, which had arrived in Clarges-street that morning, and found that the French maid had been paid, and dismissed the night before.

“But then, Victor!” said Theresa, “Victor—to whom we have been so invariably kind—

surely, he must have heard some rumour of this, and might have come near us."

Mrs. Dering could have told her pampered child that the unfortunate have no friends—that when the world's good gifts desert its votaries, all the friends of our summer days take unto themselves wings as well, and that even the desertion of Victor was only to be expected. But Theresa was in too critical a state to bear being preached to; her nerves were so highly wrought on at that time, that Mrs. Dering was in a perfect agony lest the powers of her mind should give way. The predicament, therefore, in which the mother was soon after placed, may be more easily imagined than described, when Theresa declared she could no longer endure the suspense in which they were existing—knowing nothing—hearing nothing—seeing no one—that she must and would learn what was going on in Curzon-street, and that she would go out that very night, and see what she could discover, if only by standing opposite the house

of which she had once been the proud and absolute mistress.

And now, Mrs. Dering felt herself compelled to show Theresa her husband's letter—that calm, cold, epistle, in which he had so methodically laid out plans, and given directions as to their future course, and in a moment, Theresa thought she saw why her mother opposed the step she had just contemplated. Mr. Chetwode's letter said, "Mrs. Dering was never to let her daughter out of her sight."

"Then, mother, you must go with me."

But here, again, was a difficulty;—how did Mrs. Dering know but that even that act would come within the "reservations," and that the very air of Curzon street would endanger her thousand-a-year. She quaked for that thousand-a-year—trembled, lest by the wilful daring of her daughter, that precious sum should, somehow or other, slip through her fingers; and then, again, on the other side, there was the fearful dread of Theresa's mind;

—what if opposition should drive her mad!—far better leave Town, without an hour's delay and go to the very ends of the earth, rather than run the risk of *either*.

“I must—I *will* know,” gasped Theresa, when her mother's objections had nearly distracted her. “I see what you dread—it is the loss of that contemptible money.”

“You may call it contemptible,” returned her mother; “but how are we to exist without it?”

“As we did before I was married; you have more now than we had then, for now you have not Georgina; but it is no use talking, mamma—I will not, cannot exist in this state—I must know the truth, and the worst—for something tells me that all has not been quiet in Curzon street: if you positively lock the doors, and prevent my leaving the house, there is but one alternative—you must go and make enquiries yourself.”

“I!” cried Mrs. Dering, dismayed at the very proposal. “I, go and be seen enquiring

after the man who has thrown my innocent child on the world, and discarded her, as though she were a disgraced wife?"

"That is all very fine," said her daughter "but it will not satisfy me; I *am* innocent—you know it, and so will he some day, and his weak, craven heart may come and cringe at my feet again—but with that we have nothing to do—all I insist is, that you go to Curzon-street and see what has happened—I *feel* that all has not gone smoothly," she added, pressing her hand upon her heart; "and if you want an errand, or an excuse, take back those worthless diamonds—what good can they do me now?"

But that was an errand which Mrs. Dering, for some unknown reason of her own, did not choose to execute; she held out manfully about not going to Curzon Street for some time, but at last an indomitable will overpowered her, and she went---in the twilight---stealing along like a thief, and nothing to support her trembling steps, and sinking spirit, except the consciousness that at home, safe in her desk, were

two hundred and fifty pounds, received that morning as the first payment of the thousand a year.

On reaching the house, she found all the doors open—the servants—the few that were left—were in the hall, and it was full of packages and matting. At the door there was a van, and the symptoms of departure were so boisterous, that Mrs. Dering took a long breath, and feeling assured Chetwode was not in the house, slid through the boxes in the hall, and made her way into the dining-room, where she saw the butler.

That butler was rather a friend of hers;—many and many a half-crown had she given him for concealing the fact that she was in lodgings, and receiving the cards of her numerous visitors, as if she were staying in Curzon Street. Many and many had she also bestowed on him for mis-laying, in a most miraculous and and pertinacious manner, the multiplicity of small bills which were con-

stantly arriving for her, and so arranging, that in the confusion of a move to Seaton, or a trip abroad, they all re-appeared—got mixed up with Theresa's private accounts—were put down in her "book," and were finally paid, and done with.

Thus, this man was a friend, and something like a benefactor too; Mrs. Dering's gratitude to him always exhibited itself in extreme civility, and he was more tolerant of her than most of the other servants, who could not endure her. To him therefore she now appealed, and though there was a sort of easy familiarity in his manner towards her now, which at any other time would have been at the risk of his situation, still she got out of him as much as she wanted, and almost fled the house when he had done telling all he knew.

On regaining her lodgings, it was getting dark, and the rain was falling heavily; it was oppressively hot, and a thunder-storm was

rumbling in the distance. Theresa, tortured by suspense and agony of mind, was awaiting her return with flushed cheeks and fevered lips—she had hardly patience to wait till the door was closed, before her impatient questions poured out.

“Have you seen him?—have you been in the house?”

“Yes—I went in—I saw only the butler—Mr. Chetwode left town early this morning, and—and—”

“Speak faster, for mercy’s sake!—he had left town—where was he gone?”

“They thought to Seaton—they were not quite sure.”

“To Seaton! ah, misery! then he must have met the Keatings, or else prevented their coming at all! otherwise Georgy would have been with me before this!—but what else?—you are so slow, Mamma, you drive me frantic.”

“My dearest what else would you have me tell you?”

"You have something to tell which you have not told—you know you have!—I can see it in your face—there was an expression of horror on it when you came in which you could not hide—tell me all—tell me the worst!—why stammer so?"—she exclaimed imperatively, as Mrs. Dering in vain essayed to frame some excuse and some denial—"do you suppose I do not know enough of the world to feel sure, that if that man believes me guilty, and if he is not a coward, he must avenge the honour which he thinks I have sullied?—go on mother!—tell me what he has done."

Mrs. Dering sat down;—she was more overpowered than her daughter;—Theresa had her sense of wrong and injury to support her, but Mrs. Dering had nothing;—she again sought in vain for words to break the news she had gathered, and none would come; all she could say was,

"You have guessed rightly—I suppose there was no alternative—an angel from Heaven

would not have persuaded Mr. Chetwode that you did not know the contents of that letter—and so—”

“And so,” said Theresa, under her breath, “he—he challenged.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Dering briefly.

“And they met?”—still in the same whispered tone.

“Yes.”

“They met!” cried Theresa wildly, and grasping her mother’s shaking hands—“Edward met him!—Edward, who knew my innocence!—who could have sworn with such truth that never, never, never, from his lips, since, my marriage, has one word of love fallen!”

“That letter, Theresa!” interrupted her mother.

“Well I never read it—God knows I never did!—and if I had, no doubt I should have read nothing but kind sympathy and imploring hopes that I would try to submit myself to my wretched fate—just such letters as he

always wrote me, only Mr. Chetwode's suspicious nature made me learn to deceive him, and conceal from him everything that might add a drop to my poisoned cup—but that letter?"

"Alas, Theresa, in that Sydenham forgot you were a wife—and he offered you the means of escaping from the fate you imprudently told him was so wretched—after that, and finding the letter open, what could your husband suppose?—the letter concluded by saying that—'if you consented—you were to wear round your throat, an enamelled snake.'"

Theresa started—the whole truth now broke on her like a flood of light, and shuddering, she hid her face in her hands—

"Now go on," she said, after a long silence--- go on to the end—they met, you say?"

"This morning—at sunrise."

"Was he wounded?"

The question had to be asked twice before Mrs. Dering bethought herself of saying,

"No—I told you he left town to-day."

“Not him!—not *him*”—was the passionate exclamation...“I ask you again—“was he wounded?”

Yes—Sydenham had been wounded, and it was that intelligence that had stamped on Mrs. Dering’s countenance such an expression of horror, that her daughter had instantly seen it. Sydenham had been wounded in the chest, but it was thought not to be dangerously. Mrs. Dering could glean no particulars, but the bare fact of his being wounded was enough for Theresa. She threw herself again into one of those fits of violent and intemperate grief which had before so terrified her mother, that well might poor Mrs. Dering have ejaculated to herself in the morning, “A pretty prospect I have before me!” for if this were to go on continually, or occur constantly, no nerves could stand it.

Her worst trial, however, was yet to come; that night, in the midst of the storm—rain, and thunder, and lightning, was she compelled by Theresa, after a long and most strenuous

resistance, to go, disguised in a dress in which certainly no soul would have recognised her, partly in a cold street cab, and partly through the swimming streets on foot, to St. James's Place, where Sydenham resided, and after humbly ringing at the bell, was made to stand in the dripping portico till the maid who opened the door went to see if the sick gentleman's servant could come down and speak to her. She would not give her name—she dared not—but she was not kept waiting many minutes. A hasty step ran down the stairs with a light—she was beckoned into the hall by the same maid, and in another moment found herself shut into a small dining-room with—Victor!

The astonishment on her side, was great—on his, there was none. He had been expecting every hour that she would come, and Mrs. Dering, with her thousand-a-year flickering like a Will-o'-the-Wisp before her eyes, had to swear him to profound secrecy as to her visit on the plea of agitating Captain Syden-

ham, before she uttered a word on any other subject.

She then learnt that Victor had been engaged by Sydenham the moment he found that Chetwode had dismissed him; he had not been one night in his service before the duel had taken place, and now, his new master lay stretched on a bed of suffering from which it was possible he might never rise.

Even in this melancholy state of affairs, Victor did not lose sight of his own interests, and when he insinuated to Mrs. Dering that, in the event of his being thrown on the wide world, he trusted she would again take him into her service, her hasty declaration that she could not—must not—dared not, and that it was utterly impossible—impressed him very disagreeably, and roused feelings of great indignation in his breast.

He knew nothing of Mrs. Dering's accession of wealth...how could he! he did not know that a fine income was suspended, like the sword of old, over her head, and that were

even the act she was then committing, known, it would fall to the ground and crush her beneath its weight—therefore he ventured to remonstrate—to remind her of his long and faithful services—and to hint to her that if he really required a home, he should not hesitate to appeal to Mrs. Chetwode herself, for he understood she was under Mrs. Dering's protection, and he was always able to ascertain her address. Mrs. Dering had taken him quite as a child, and brought him up, therefore now, in a land of strangers, he did not mean to be quite thrown off, for no reason, and no fault.

Terrified at his manner—nervous because she felt she was doing wrong—she tried all she could to pacify her wounded protégé, and then, panting to be safe once more in her lodgings, she took her departure; far too shocked, frightened and faint, to think of calling a cab, she reached Clarges Street, wet to the skin.

When once there, she immediately resolved on telling a string of falsehoods, for never would she again go through all she had experi-

enced in the last four and twenty hours. She began therefore by tranquillizing Theresa as to the state of the wound of Sydenham, assuring her that there was no danger to be feared from it, whilst all the time her natural feeling and affection for one whom she had known from a boy upwards, was choking her utterance; she then mentioned the circumstance of Victor being with him, which was an additional source of comfort to her daughter, and she concluded by vehemently impressing on her, the wisdom of their leaving Town without a single day's unnecessary delay.

The next morning, therefore, long before a shutter in the dismal street was opened, or even an early milk-woman raised her harmonious cry at the different area gates, a hired travelling carriage and post-horses stood at the door of Mrs. Dering's lodgings in Clarges Street...her apartments rather, for she was very touchy about that word...and a tall, slight figure was almost carried out of the house, almost lifted into the cushioned seat prepared

for her and whirled away, before even the policeman, whose steps had been arrested at the sight of so quiet a departure, at that time in the morning, had had time to enquire of the post-boy who they were.

And they went on...down the street, and round the corner rapidly...and by the time the busy world of London were astir, a large bill was put up in the window of the vacated lodgings in the very same hour that a similar document was placed in the window of a house in Curzon Street...both equally denoting, "This House to Let."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A YEAR has passed—one long year—yet it has brought no changes as far as regards those who, in our last chapter, were separated. The usual family discussions on such an event—the usual family endeavours to bring matters round again, and promote a reconciliation, had all taken place, yet no change had been wrought, for Mark Chetwode was inflexible.

In vain the family of the discarded wife besought him to recollect the injury he was doing her in the eyes of the world—the stigma he was attaching to her name—the dishonour he was needlessly bringing upon his own—for Theresa was innocent.

“It may be so,” had always been his reply,

“but she at all events deceived me, and I will never see her face again; if I have not provided sufficiently for her comfort, I am ready to do more, much more, but I will never take her back. I can never be happy, but I might be much more wretched if I again placed my happiness in her power, therefore entreaties are of no avail—we are parted for ever.”

Meanwhile, from place to place on the southern coast of England, did Mrs. Dering and her daughter,—now an invalid, and crawling from one warm spot to another in search of health,—wander by themselves, attended only by that same venerable lady’s maid, that miracle of fidelity, who had served Mrs. Dering in sunshine and in storm, and never wished to better herself.

It was August, when, unable to continue their wanderings owing to the intense heat of the weather, they took a cottage in a quiet little budding watering-place, and proposed remaining there till the spirit moved them to change their abode again. It was this constant

change that seemed to be the means of keeping Theresa alive ; her health had given way and there was a restless irritability about her, which could only be allayed by continual variety.

The spot they had chosen for their resting place was uninviting enough to pleasure-seekers, but it suited Theresa, for there was a wide sea-beach, shelving down to the water's edge, on which she would sit for hours and hours, never seeing a soul, watching only the waves and the shipping, and hardly conscious that there was such a sensation in the world as hunger, for unless led into the house at stated hours by her mother, she would have sat there, gazing on the sea, the live-long day.

One day, when as usual, she had taken her seat on the beach and was leaning against her mother's shoulder, Mrs. Dering was attracted by the unusual sound of footsteps on the shingles behind them, and on turning round, saw an invalid's chair passing along the upper part of the beach, with a man-servant walking by the side of it.

Theresa took no notice ; she shunned all observation now, and dreaded meeting any strange eye, but Mrs. Dering, from long habit, never could see any one who struck her fancy, but she must instantly enter into a maze of conjectures as to who they could possibly be.

The invalid now passing, had rivetted her attention the moment his chair appeared in sight, and his appearance interested her, but what was her amazement, and her dismay, when on looking at his attendant, she recognised as they approached, the unmistakeable features of Victor !—In a moment she, of course, knew him whose shrunk form rested in that chair, and whose wan, attenuated face was thrown back on the pillows which supported him ;—what a wreck !—and then she looked hastily round for her own child—a vague comparison having risen painfully before her eyes.

Theresa had risen—her eyes were on the same object that had occupied her mother's attention for the last few moments, and round

her parted lips was an expression of anguish so deep, so heart-broken, that Mrs. Dering could neither speak, nor move—she had no courage to break in upon that reverie of evident grief, and agony of remorse. Neither mother nor daughter moved—they stood there, watching the retreating figures—unobserved themselves—and never stirred till a turn hid them from their sight, and even then, both were mute.

They went to their home—the silence thus begun, lasted till evening, and Mrs. Dering was in a state of the most pitiable perplexity; what to do she knew not; stay in the same town with him against whom the express injunction had been passed, she dared not—the thousand a year was again flickering, and wavering, and trembling over her head—yet would Theresa go?—could she venture to indulge the faintest hope that she would hear of leaving the spot?—could Mrs. Dering flatter herself for one moment that in a case like the present, she could prevail on one so wilful to act according to rules

laid down, and regulations framed in the form of commands?

It was not till the evening that Theresa spoke, and then she said,

“Mother—you told me the wound was not dangerous?”

She was apparently thinking aloud, and her mother did not like to break the delusion, so she answered,

“My dearest—that was a year ago.”

“And he has lingered till now!”

Neither spoke again for some time, and then the same scene that Mrs. Dering had been subjected to in Clarges-street, was once more repeated—she was compelled to promise to find out the abode of the dying man--(for both mother and daughter had read death in his face), and see whether they could be of any service in soothing the last moments of one whom they had known so well and so long.

Mrs. Dering was not a woman to be easily roused, but on this occasion she was as angry

and as indignant as she ever was in her life---yet Theresa had her way.

"I will go," said her mother, "I will go, but only on condition that at sunrise to-morrow we leave this place---I have made many sacrifices for you Theresa, and I have done as much as any mother *could* do, but I cannot allow you to beggar me, when I am too old and too shattered in health and spirits, to bear the privations of poverty."

But she went nevertheless--less fearful of being discovered now, ~~than~~ when bent on a similar errand to St. James's Place--and the retreat of the sick man was easily found.

She was received, as before, by Victor, and this time he did not hesitate to tell her, that the life of Edward Sydenham was no longer numbered by days, but by hours; that airing in the wheeled chair would prove, in all probability, his last, and after a conference of an hour, when Mrs. Dering was about to retrace her steps home, her quondam "treasure of a

man " revived the subject of his return into her service, and wished to know if she positively refused to take him back ?

To this, she had but one answer to give, but she worded it as considerately as she could ; Victor then asked her reason, and she was not prepared with one ; he pressed the point and she grew angry, and then over his features there passed so dark a scowl that it haunted her for hours.

When she got into the open air again she breathed more freely, and as she wended her way back with almost flying steps, she resolved that the carriage and post-horses to convey them away should be at the door at nine the following morning, and their destination should be a mystery to those they left behind.

" This time, she did not deceive Theresa—she knew it was no use—but she imparted her intelligence as gently as she could, and to her surprise it was received without a tear, a sigh, or a vestige of emotion. Theresa seemed

stunned, and from that moment was passive in her mother's hands.

The next morning, they were both up as they had arranged, by sunrise, and by eight o'clock all was ready for their departure.

At the breakfast table in the window sat Theresa, whilst in a distant part of the room Mrs. Dering was packing her desk, when suddenly her daughter called her, and pointing to a figure hurrying across the road, she exclaimed,

“He brings some news.”

Mrs. Dering turned cold—an indefinable sensation of dread crept over her, and she begged her daughter to go up-stairs whilst she ascertained on what errand Victor was bent.

Theresa obeyed, and the man entered. Mrs. Dering saw by his face, the announcement he was come to make, and she could only exclaim,

“So soon! is it really over?”

“He is gone,” answered Victor, “I slept by his side, but I heard no sound throughout

the night—this morning when I awoke, I found it was all over.”

At that moment Mrs. Dering heard a step ascend the stairs very quickly, and immediately afterwards, a heavy fall in the room above—she instantly flew to the spot, and there, extended on the floor, lay Theresa, senseless.

Victor was now left alone in the drawing-room; he hardly knew whether to go or to stay, till, at last, seeing that a sudden breeze had scattered the loose papers on Mrs. Dering's desk—he resolved upon the latter, and began collecting them. As he did this, the handwriting of his former master caught his eye, and taking up the letter, he read it from beginning to end.

A new light now burst upon the wily man, and as Chetwode's injunctions and commands met his sight, he speedily comprehended the reason of Mrs. Dering's obstinate, and till now, unaccountable refusal, to take him back into her service. The rancour which this refusal

had excited in his breast, now broke into a furious flame, and though his hatred of Chetwode was great, his contempt for Mrs. Dering was greater, and therefore, for the many grudges he owed her, he now resolved to be revenged.

That the words "*if ever you so fail in the charge entrusted to you, &c., &c., * * or in any way directly or indirectly to hold any communication with him, or any one connected with him*"—that these words applied in part to himself, Victor had no doubt; therefore, that he should be the medium of boldly declaring the breach of trust of which Mrs. Dering had been guilty, was a two-edged sword in his hands, and a weapon which would strike both ways.

When the widow descended, Victor was gone, and in the hurry of departure, a departure which she expedited as much as possible, in the dread that he would return, she never missed Chetwode's letter, of which Victor had possessed himself in order to authenticate the statement which he had hastened home to execute.

Two months from that date, when the usual quarterly payment was made, Mrs. Dering received with the two hundred and fifty pounds, an intimation, that from henceforth, the sum would be discontinued, and an allowance, a comparative pittance only, paid to her account, in consequence of her contempt of the most express commands, and violation of a most solemn trust.

This intimation came at a time when even on the worldly heart of Mrs. Dering, it inflicted no pang, for she was watching then, the fleeting sands passing through the hour-glass of life, and the prosperity or adversity of the world seemed of little consequence to her, when she, who had been the idol of her existence, her hope, her delight, and her pride, was wasting away beneath her eyes, in the flower of her youth.

* * * * *

Another year has passed by—another long year—and again we come back to the old house

in Hill-street. It has resumed its ancient character ; it bears again the stamp of its quiet inmates, and those who formed one family of three individuals when first these pages opened, now gather round the silent hearth again, as in days gone by—to all outward appearance, little changed, beyond the natural ravages of grief and time ; but there is desolation in at least *one* heart.

Crouched over the fire, that winters'-evening—sitting in the dusk—and the occasional flashes of light, glittering on the large tears which were slowly gathering in his eyes, and dropping on a letter over which he bent, sat Mark Chetwode. The border of that letter was deeply edged with black, and those who saw him open and read it, had abstained from aught except the silent sympathy of looks.

He was in his home—his own old home again—all around him seemed the same ; but she, who in two short years, had embittered his existence, and withered his heart, though now

gone from him for ever, had left him, severed in spirit from those amongst whom he now sat, a distinct and solitary being; she had been as a cherished link, added on to his household chain by the tenderest of ties, and now that that link was lost, the chain would not reunite, but left him desolate and alone.

THE END.

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